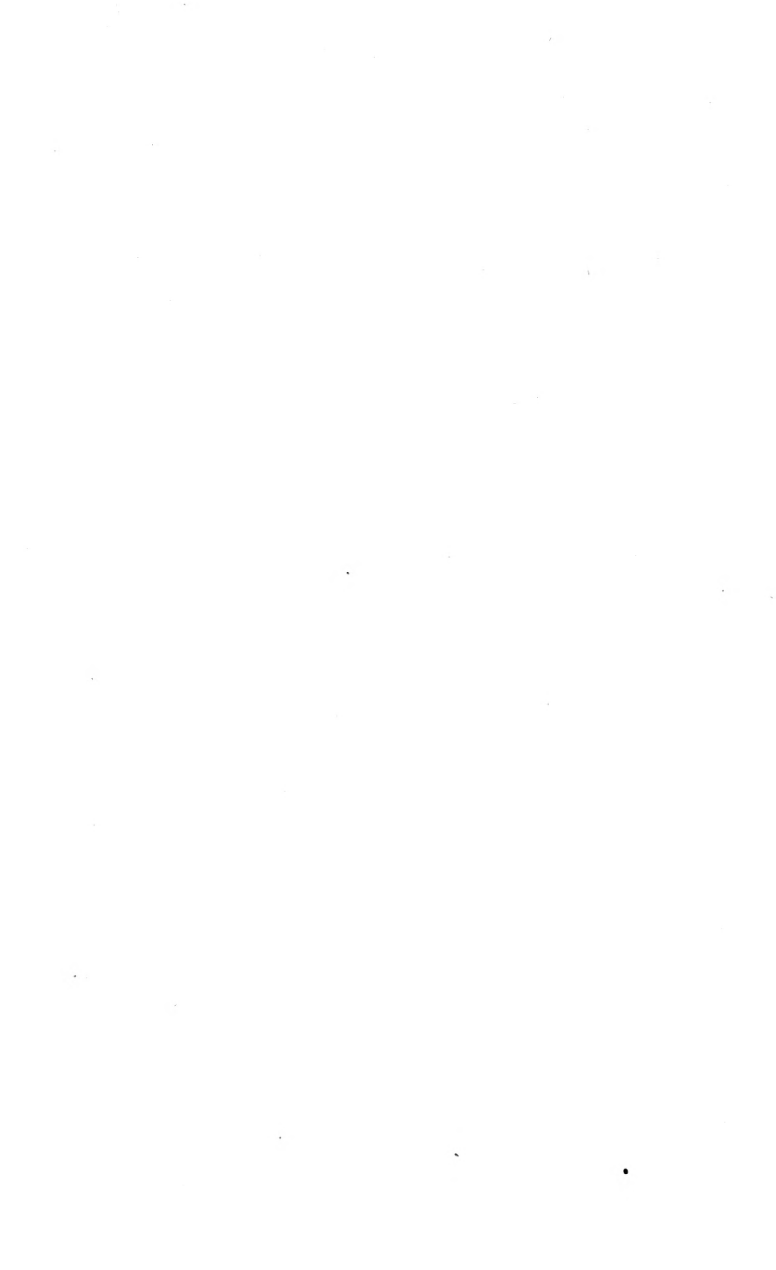


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THE LONG LANE

BY

ETHEL COXON

AUTHOR OF 'A BASIL PLANT' 'MONSIEUR LOVE' ETC.

'Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still'

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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THE LONG LANE.



CHAPTER XIX.

Nobody has ever been able to change to-day into to-morrow—or into yesterday; and yet everybody who has much energy of character is trying to do one or the other.

JULIUS HARE.

MEANWHILE Honor had stepped out into the open air; the summer breeze touched her forehead sweetly and gently, and refreshed her. She walked a little way, then, hailing a fiacre, told the man to drive her to the station, where her old travelling experiences with Agnes made her know she would catch the evening train for Dieppe.

She ignored the mail train for Folkestone, which would have been her quicker and more obvious route.

In a few minutes she was at the station. The rush and hurry and crowd of passengers towards the platform told her she had no time to lose, and in another minute or two she was seated in a carriage, and the train was slowly moving out of the station, its speed quickening as it left behind it the great glaring city, the crowds and light and colour, which had all appeared as the jumbled-up hues of a shaken kaleidoscope to Honor during these past few days.

The past was as a dream, from which she had awakened to find herself speeding along in this rushing, swaying train, flying past the flower-sown fields, of which the

freshness and sweetness were borne in through the open window with the wild night air.

So Honor leant back in her seat, her eyes fixed where the rising moon glowed with an angry fire, low down behind the far-stretching sea of tall grasses, and then grew pure and fair, as she rose above the earth and the cloud banks, and looked down cold and sweet and serene on the land dreaming in her light, on the noisy train, with the long trail of glare cast from its windows over the meadows pale in her softer shine, and on the wild hunted countenance of the woman, on whom was slowly growing the meaning of her act of flight.

The meaning to herself, that is; she was still too ignorant of the world in many ways to know how the larger part

of the world, and probably her husband, would interpret her madness.

She had brought her misery on herself; that she owned freely. If any bitter resentment against Agnes stirred in her heart, she yet knew that her fate had been in her own hand. Instead of possessing her soul in patience, she had recklessly, ignorantly marred and ruined its good. She could not retrieve all; she could never again be Honor Denne, whom a few years would have made queen o'er herself in act as well as thought—never again!

Such life as might yet be hers must feel to the end the galling shackle of a chain, albeit its links were broken, and by her own hand. All she had lost by her deed, that which many women would have held dearly, the brightness and pleasure

and admiring homage which the world gladly yields to a beautiful woman—these she cared little for—had indeed scarcely proved, despite her one brief season in London.

She had one goal in view, which grew clearer before her as the train rushed on—Trebarva, where she would be quiet, and Mary's tender care would calm and soothe her. She could rest there, and, like a tired child, she needed nothing but rest. The thought of that haven, after the waves of this troublesome world, was enough, if not for happiness, for peace. No one would seek her there. Agnes had never heard the word Trebarva, unless Mr. Denne had carelessly mentioned it to her. She would never dream of Honor's finding refuge there. Would her husband discover her,

and try to make her come back? Her lips tightened, her eyes became hard, bright, defiant at the thought. No, not that, at least.

She arrived in London, tired out, with a general pallor of face and black circles round her eyes, and with her past excitement burnt out. She had grown very practical during the last twenty-four hours' unaided travelling, and had made up her mind to start for Cornwall by the next evening's train. The large hotel at which she put up was dismal, and the people stared at her oddly—no wonder; in her tumbled, draggled dress of soft, pale green silk, half hidden though it was by her long cloak.

What should she do? She remembered that her old dresses and other belongings,

superseded by the new finery of the trousseau, had been packed in a trunk, and left, with most of her other smart, big, new boxes, at Bryanston Square, to await her return. Her absence had been shorter than was expected; she never wished to see again any of her fine clothes, the gathering together of which had been Agnes's chief occupation for six weeks before the wedding. But she could not go to Cornwall as entirely without resources as she was at present—she would go and fetch that box.

The one servant left in charge of the house stared at her, as at a ghost, but Honor's quietude reassured her, and, with the aid of the cabman, she dragged the trunk downstairs. 'You've come back soon, Miss Honor; ma'am, I mean,' said the hand-

maiden, panting and breathless. ‘Didn’t you like Paris?’

‘No—thank you, Elizabeth; that is right. Good-bye.’

Honor was rather astonished to find how easy it was to manage for herself, as a woman who has never been taught self-reliance often is; and when she had returned to the hotel, taken off her smart draggled gown and replaced it by a plain one of heather cloth, she felt ready to start. She had still that unreal sense of either being in a dream or having awakened from one; there seemed so great a gulf fixed between this day and those in Paris which had led to it.

She asked for her bill, paid it, and was met by the fact that, after so doing, her purse held but four or five pounds; enough

to take her down into Cornwall, but no more, and a new idea startled her: what was she to do for money?

She had the vaguest notions on the subject of expenditure; knew nothing of what right she had over her own income, or how to obtain possession thereof. For all she knew, her husband might be entitled to it all, now she had left him. At all events, she could not obtain any portion thereof, and neither could she be a burden on Mary—what should she do?

The sudden gleam of a ring on her finger was like a whisper in her ear.

The diamonds! They were her own: Mr. Clay had said so, and that she could sell them, if she would. If she did so, then if Mary would have her, she could stay at Trebarva for good.

But she must make haste; the afternoon was advancing, and the bank where they had been deposited would be shut.

The manager received her courteously, asked her to wait in his room till the jewels were fetched from their safe-keeping below, and sat chatting to her, rather wondering at her abstracted manner and the absence of her husband. 'I suppose you are only passing through town? Ah! here are the cases.'

'I don't want them all,' said Honor. They had been her mother's jewels, and though, personally, she cared little for them, an odd reluctance to part from them for ever woke within her. 'I will take the bracelets and this star. They will do; thank you very much.'

The words struck the manager; he

looked at her pale, overwrought face ; her husband's absence seemed stranger than it had done before. 'Is there anything wrong?' he wondered, as she signed the receipt he had written out for the jewels. Shall I suggest that she can draw on her separate account here? No; she may not wish to do that, and wouldn't thank me for seeming to know she wants money—the diamonds are her own after all. It's no business of mine.

He saw Honor to the door and into a hansom, told the man to drive as she directed down Piccadilly, and then went back to his inner room. 'I suppose it's all right,' he said to himself, as for reassurance, 'but there was something queer about her look—Here, Jones, take these cases down to the safe.'

Honor stopped at the jeweller's where her father and Agnes had always dealt. She would have preferred going to a stranger, had it not been for her dread, not so much of being cheated, as being questioned as to her name, or her possession of the diamonds.

The bland gentleman, called at her request from his sanctum at the back of the shop, was also somewhat surprised at her appearance, as at her mission ; but brides wishing to raise money unknown to their husbands and seizing that easiest means to the purpose—their jewellery—were not unusual facts in his experience. He offered to accommodate Honor by keeping her stones in pledge, but the young lady raised her cold, direct eyes and looked straight at him, in a disconcerting

fashion which prevented his pressing his friendly offer. 'I wish to sell them,' she repeated. 'Will you tell me the value?'

'Or what we can afford to offer,' said Mr. Thornton, with praiseworthy honesty; 'I must tell you frankly, madam, we cannot afford to give what should be the full value.' He handed the jewels over to a subordinate to be tested within and weighed—then continued:

'By the way, madam, here is our execution of an order we received five days ago from Sir Robert Field, who is staying at Steerholt. I thought you would be interested in it.'

Steerholt was the house in Scotland where Agnes was at present visiting, and Sir Robert Field was a bachelor of about thirty-seven or so; not over-clever, but enor-

mously rich, and much given, as Honor knew by experience, to dropping in to afternoon tea at Bryanston Square, and usually included in Mrs. Denne's little dinners. Honor had understood he was very fond of Agnes, but the idea of her step-mother's marrying again had never crossed her mind till now, as Mr. Thornton handed, for her inspection, a wonderful ring with interlaced cipher of tiny diamonds and sapphires, and engraved inside: 'Agnes, July 28'—Honor's wedding day.

'I saw the engagement in yesterday's "Post,"' said Mr. Thornton in his tone of deferential congratulation. 'They always say, madam, one marriage makes many.'

Honor did not reply. This news, so told, added to her bewilderment at the world. It was all changed and changing; was she

changed with it? Her own face in the mirrors of the shop seemed strange, because it was still that of the girl she had always known, while she herself felt so different. She, who since her father's second marriage had never been allowed even to choose a gown for herself, had now severed herself from all alien control and must guide her own will.

Mr. Thornton was called into consultation over Honor's property, in the inner shop, and she stood awaiting his decision. Her nerves were too tensely strung to allow her to sit quietly. Presently the jeweller returned and tendered her his offer for the diamonds—1,000*l*.

That would mean a sufficient income for her for some years, if she were careful. She accepted it and drove back to the

hotel with the bank-notes stuffed into the inner pocket of her double-breasted bodice. It was very strange to have so much money about her; what should she do with it? Never mind, she would ask Mary when she reached Cornwall.

When she reached Cornwall! The words worked themselves into a longing sigh. She was so tired, and everything was so strange. Agnes was going to marry again, and what would become of Lionel, the child whom his sister loved, who loved her in his own sweet, childish, sturdy and wilful way? Would his mother have other children and cease to care for him?

Honor was roused from her wonderings by seeing flash past her, in another hansom burdened with portmanteaus, bundles of

railway rugs and sticks, &c.—her husband ! There was a strange pain, she fancied, in his face, though he was looking the other way and did not see her. Was he unhappy for her ?

For an instant, a convicting self-reproach seized her ; there had been, in the world, a duty she had by her own act singled out for hers and then cast from her, but which was not to be escaped by any sense of its bitterness, or by rebellion against it. Then came a revulsion of unreasoning anger, a steeling of herself against thought or conscience, in an armour of her own wretchedness and self-will. So, he had pursued her ! But even if he found her, she had chosen her own path now, and would walk therein to the end.

CHAPTER XX.

Open thine heart wide,
And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.
MRS. BROWNING.

AND the next morning, after a feverish night's travelling, Honor felt yet more keenly as though she had awakened in a new world and had left the past behind her. All around her, as the train sped on, were the mystery and greenness of the deep oak woods, silent in the morning freshness, great heights of thick-leaved trees with the morning mists still wreathing soft and grey about them, and the clear light touching now the hill-tops and now the valleys from greenness into gold.

Above was the blue of the sky, and presently the oak woods broke, and in the distance the sea sparkled and shone in a deeper glory of blue ; till, in the beauty of this, her new world, Honor forgot all else for a little while.

Another two hours' travelling and she found herself in the parlour of an inn at Polmouth, waiting for any vehicle which could be found to convey her over the twenty miles of moorland which still lay between her and Trebarva. She was looking on the quiet rich loveliness wherein two centuries ago another woman found comfort—a sweet-natured, sensitive girl, whose finely touched spirit was wearing out life beside the dissipated boor of a Cornish squire, whom she had been bullied into marrying.

Honor knew nothing of that brave and gentle soul; nothing of Mary Pendarves' long bitterness of endurance, long struggle of wifely duty; nor, indeed, would she in her fierce defiance, which was yet so piteous, have had sympathy with the earlier woman, or understood the noble patience which supported Mrs. Pendarves when she looked out on the glittering waves of that bay where the river met the sea, longing either for fuller life or for death; as La Pia may have longed in her prison among the Tuscan marshes.

It was some hours before a carriage could be obtained for Honor's long drive; and when, at length, she was mounted in the shaky old phaeton, which proved her lot, and the woods and rivers of Polmouth were left behind, she began to realise

Mary's stories of the wildness and barrenness of the land between that town and Trebarva.

It was a sad landscape, even in its stern, lonely beauty ; those long wastes of stony moor, where the sheep nibbled the wild dry turf, and the heather flushed a sudden vivid glory here and there ; those distant gleams of sea, stained and patched and flecked with all changing lights and shades of green and blue ; those glimpses of little bays with cool white stretches of sand, beyond the pale glassy azure of the thick tracts of sea-holly—but if Mary Ross had lived here contentedly, she could do so too.

‘It’s a lonesome place, Trebarva, miss,’ said the driver, turning affably round and breaking in on her dreams.

‘Is it?’ she answered, ‘more lonely than this?’ looking round on the apparently unending expanse of moor and the scattered grey rocks upbreaking through the dry turf.

‘No,’ said the man, as considering; ‘I’ll not say that; but you see it’s out of the beat, and even in the summer there’s not a many visitors that way; the parts they likes best are on the other side of the coast. There’ll be a few ladies and gentlemen at Lynion for a day or two in the summer; but Trebarva’s all by itself; and the lady you’re going to, she doesn’t see anyone except the clergyman now and then and the fishing folk about there. Now her brother, Mr. Halleck,’ pursued the man, flicking up his horse as they dragged up a stony hill, ‘he used to ride about and

see his friends around the country ; for the family, as you know, has been here since '— with a true Cornish liberality of genealogical statement—' since the Drooids ; but Mrs. Ross, she doesn't seem to care for much but her books, and she's left off the farming all but one cow.'

Much of this Honor had known before ; but she was glad of the driver's unconscious confirmation of her own belief that at Trebarva she would be secure from discovery. She was a little surprised to find the man knew as much as he did about Trebarva and its mistress ; but his next words explained this :

' My mother's cousin, Ruth Thomas, and her husband have been servants there since they was married and he left the sea, so I know some'ut o' the place, and

that the Hallecks were part of our real old gentry, though I can't tell why they built their house in such a lonesome part.

‘Is it a big house?’ questioned Honor.

‘Tolerable large; there's a room they say John Wesley slept in, the night before a big preaching, although the Hallecks were Church folk. But there's little Church in these parts,’ quoth the driver, waxing polemical with the scorn of the West Country Wesleyan for the Establishment; ‘Lynion Church don't hold more than forty souls, and it's four miles from Trebarva. Men's salvation don't owe much hereabouts to the Archbishop of Canterbury.’

He was as ready as most of his people for a theological discussion, and rather disappointed to find his sarcasm on the

chief ecclesiastical shepherd of England met with no return from his auditor; but Honor was watching the sunset glow flush the sky. Was it possible that, only three days before, she had seen those roseate trails of cloud across the purpling blue, from that hotel window in Paris? A strange chill overcame her, that was not born of the evening shadow creeping slowly over the wide moorland. Had she done wrong after all? Well, what was done was done.

When she reached Trebarva, it was dark, and in answer to the unaccustomed knock at the front door, it opened and a stream of light fell on the girl standing there.

A wondering figure beyond, within, started as puzzled and incredulous, scarce

daring to hope ; then at Honor's appealing, half-sobbing cry, ' Mary ! ' Mrs. Ross's arms were outstretched, and the tired, lonely, passionate heart clasped to hers felt rest and warmth and help at last.

' But your husband ? ' asked Mrs. Ross, as she and her darling, the first confusion of greeting over, were standing in the sitting-room, the elder friend still scarcely able to comprehend this tall beautiful girl was the child she had parted from four years before : ' is he coming here too ? '

Then she saw in the lamp-light how tired and haggard her child's face was with no mere bodily fatigue, but with an inward weariness as well, and she dreaded Honor's answer.

It came slowly yet passionately.

' I have come to live with you, if you

will have me. Don't turn me away, don't ask me anything; you must trust me as you used to, when——'

Then all her control gave way and her words were strangled by tears; her arms clung to Mrs. Ross, and the long strain on her whole being broke down in a child's appeal, a child's wild sobbing—'Oh, Mary, whenever I was wretched, I always came to you.'

CHAPTER XXI.

Thou hast been, shalt be, art alone,
Or, if not quite alone, yet they
Which touch thee are unmating things ;—
Ocean and clouds and night and day,
Lone autumns and triumphant springs.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

Mrs. Ross made no answer, except by the strong clasp of her arms round her darling. At first it was all dim and confused, then gradually, as the days went on, she began to understand far more than Honor ever told her. Honor's brooding manner, the dumb passion of her eyes when the subject was touched on, told her friend all she needed to know :—with a tender firmness born of a resolute determination to do right, she tried to persuade Honor to

return to her husband and ask him to forgive her rash, sudden flight, but Honor turned on her with a fierce decision which rendered further pleading impossible.

‘You may make me leave you,’ she said, ‘but that is all. I would never do what you tell me, if I were starving or dying. ‘Don’t speak of it again, because I can’t bear it.’

‘It is only for your sake,’ answered Mrs. Ross.

‘Then let me stay here and be happy ;’ a faint bitter smile at her own word touched Honor’s mouth ; ‘you won’t grow tired of me—will you?’

‘Norah ! if you knew what it is to have you again !’

‘Don’t—’ Honor winced—‘I mean, never call me by that name again. I hate

it now.' She pulled off the thick wedding-ring which still fettered her finger : 'Take care of this,' she said—what morbid feeling was it which made her dislike guarding it herself and yet reluctant to throw it away? 'I am Honor Ross now, your niece, and will forget everything else, if I can.' A long dragging sigh ended her words, and Mrs. Ross's eyes followed her with a sad, fond longing to restore to her all she had lost of brightness and hope and joy.

And yet their life grew to be happy, in its own quiet way, and Honor enjoyed its wild freedom. She became clear of eye and light of limb, and almost seemed to be living her childhood over again, in the delight of clambering about the rocks, her daring growing with her sense of self-reliance and

safety, and in the pleasure of driving in her boat before or against a squall, or of long, lonely wanderings among the colour and sweetness of the heather.

She was too young and vigorous for her crushed youth not to revive within her ; and as she grew more attached to her new existence, the dread of her retreat being discovered made her wilder, shyer, and more brusque at any chance meeting with a stranger. The darker hours would still come upon her when, as her womanhood expanded and there woke within her new wants and yearnings and possibilities, born of her fast developing nature, she felt her freedom but a mockery, and those wide moors narrowed to a prison. As her will grew stronger, her power of self-control increased, and the constant check on

.

her wistful longing for something beyond these rocks, became a habit, which resulted in an outward hardness. She must 'dree her own weird,' and never for one moment did she regret the step she had taken that July night, when she had recklessly broken the shackles with which she had bound herself.

It was to still the unrest which would trouble her that she had taken to mathematics, with a vague idea that they might serve as an anodyne, and persevered in the study, though Mrs. Ross had fancied she would soon weary of it. The wayward undisciplined nature felt the strength and beauty of eternal law, when it did not sway her own actions, and so she made a law unto herself. The study gave her a feeling of stability, and she kept to it, albeit by fits

and starts, whenever the mood of dreariness and of the wastedness of her life returned to her.

So the months circled into years, and in their quietness she forgot, at times, the past. She was held as Miss Ross by the farm people and fishing folk about Trebarva. Ruth had accepted her as Miss Honor from the first; and if, with her shrewd insight, she had more inkling than Honor knew of her real name and position, she kept it to herself, with the rough reticent loyalty which was part of her character. Nothing was ever heard of any attempt to track Honor, either on the part of her husband or Agnes; and Mrs. Ross, knowing so little of the brief episode of the girl's married life, began to feel Honor was hers entirely and surely

—that no one would take her from her now.

The money, too, Honor had brought with her, made things easier at Trebarva. Mrs. Ross's income was very slender; had it been larger, she might, long before, have left the lonely grey house; but, as it was, she could not afford it, as her only chance of letting it would have been during the summer.

Now, comforts such as deep-hued curtains and rugs made the old house cheerful, and, from time to time, the two women had books and prints and photographs down from London; and Honor, seeing how her friend enjoyed these, entered into her pleasure, through sympathy, and so learned to find her own delight in them, and the new world they opened to her in

which her own life seemed a small atom, easy to forget—sometimes.

Was she happy? Mrs. Ross often wondered, but she had a tact and fear that prevented her trying to probe Honor's heart. Only one gusty winter's evening, when the wind was rising in a cry outside, above the stormy sound of the sea, she looked at the mute, beautiful figure sitting on the hearth, her eyes fixed on the flickering flames of the fire, while her hand absently stroked Dan's head. At last Mrs. Ross spoke.

‘Honor, my child, what is it?’

Honor looked up at her and answered, as if straight from her thought—

‘Leo! my little brother: I can't help thinking of him. Would papa have been angry with me for leaving him so? Was I wrong? He may want me now.’

‘He has his mother,’ said Mrs. Ross.

‘But she has another baby now—I saw it in the paper—and she and her new husband may not care for Lionel. I did love him, though I never thought of him, and now I keep fearing he is unhappy—I ought to have known.’

It seemed a new terrible, troubling thought to her that her actions could influence the lives of others, that she was responsible for more than the evil and good affecting herself.

She had risen and stood by the window, staring out into the night, her forehead pressed against the cold glass of the pane.

‘I never thought it would matter,’ she said, in a low voice, ‘or how much I should want him,’ and the heart-hunger of her tone held Mary from replying.

This was the story of Honor's life till, in the third year of her dwelling at Trebarva, she met Stephen Nugent—‘the story she could not tell him, which he could not understand.’

CHAPTER XXII.

Look in my face ; my name is ' might have been ;'
I am also called ' no more,' ' too late,' ' farewell.'

ROSSETTI.

THERE was silence in the room. Stephen did not say, ' Is this true ? ' He knew the bitterness of her words was wrung from her very heart ; knew too, as he had not yet known, that she loved him utterly, that heart and soul and brain were his, all his—and between him and her a great gulf fixed ! The hopeless misery of her eyes as they met his, pleading for pardon and help, overcame him with keener pain than his own wretchedness, and his head dropped on his hands, with a groan.

But her confession had given her strength. Now she had told him the truth, her worst anguish was over, and her love cast out fear. The old fear that had racked her through the sleepless night, the dread of his anger, his scorn, his doubt of her, were gone. He trusted her still ; in such poor measure as was possible to her she had justified his faith. The shame and bewildering terror of meeting his look had left her, even as the sorrow and passion of love filled her heart. As in a dream, Stephen heard her voice, grave and low, with a strange ring therein of child-innocence, of woman-tenderness, albeit it still trembled.

‘The worst is to have hurt you, and now what can I do?’ Her words faltered wistfully, and he raised his head, a

sudden, desperate prayer springing to his lips.

That prayer which should mean the bringing of shame to her, died unspoken, as he met the piteous love of her eyes. His head drooped again, only he stretched out his arms as if feeling towards her from a blind solitude of pain ; as beseeching the love she must deny, yet praying for help against his own weakness—all this found expression in those out-reaching, imploring arms, and the new instincts awakened in Honor, understood and answered the appeal in a mingled ecstasy of pity and longing and sorrow, all fused in remorse. Her hands met his, which closed upon them with a passionate fervour, and then she had fallen at his feet, sobbing as though her heart would break.

‘Honor, my love! oh, my love!’

Her pale lips repeated ‘love,’ as gaining courage to speak. It was strange to Stephen to see her thus, her self-restraint, self-reliance, vanished, and yet with a truer and gentler strength nerving her, for all her pain.

‘Help me!’ she said, as she rose and stood looking down, where his head was still bowed over her hand still clasped in his. ‘I can’t be brave, unless you are.’

‘Brave!’ he echoed, as though the word were a bitter jest. He looked up, but his words came heavily and slowly. ‘You mean, I must leave you’—he dropped her hand.

As if gathering strength for loneliness, she turned and walked away to the win

dow. The sad low moaning of the estranging sea smote on her ear. 'I have been so wrong,' she said at last : 'I want to do right.'

The cry of her words was as a reproach to the man whom she loved—who loved her. There came back to him the remembrance of that night in the moonlight ; of his careless, easily spoken words anent one moment in life, which might prove its ordeal. If now were Honor's trial, God help him to help her in her need. He forgot himself and his own pain ; he rose, went to her and again held her hands in his, but, this time, they both stood, as braced to struggle, and his eyes met hers loyally.

'You have done no wrong to me,' he said hoarsely. 'To love you is the best I

have ever known. It is to leave you here alone that is hard.'

There was to Honor a terrible sweetness in his words ; it was so wonderful this should be a living sorrow to him, that he should care so much for her. For one moment it seemed to make everything easy ; the dreary future was lit, even as the leaden tossing sea afar was, by one gleam of light.

Then all this hour meant—the loss of life, the parting with this new treasure of love—forced itself back on her ; her lips quivered as she said, 'I have been alone so much, don't think of that—and it is all my fault.'

He knew nothing of her past, but the child-honesty, the child-simplicity of her words touched him to the quick. Again

the strong temptation seized him, bidding him cast doubt and honour and self-control aside, to gather her to him, heedless of denial, and ask her to forget all in a love which should shelter and hold her to the end.

What breath of the storm-wind raging within him stirred Honor's heart? He could not tell, yet felt that she read the meaning of his eyes' new light. Was it an instant's answering irresolution in her own, which made their sadness change into quick questioning?

If so, in a moment that look had passed, and it was he who broke the silence : 'I can't say good-bye.'

'There is no good-bye to say.' The words were abrupt, but her voice was breaking with its weight of pain.

If he could but have held her for a minute now, as he held her yesterday, in the wild swirl of the waves, farewell would not have been so hard.

‘Only,’ he said, as answering the unspoken denial of his unspoken entreaty, ‘I am always yours. If I could take you now—’ he could not add, ‘if you are ever free;’ as it was, the flush of passionate shame that had rushed to her face rebuked him. ‘Forgive me!’ he said; there was a heat of tears in his eyes and her hand was pressed to his mouth; ‘forgive me, oh, my dearest! I love you so! I want you so much!’

He felt her hand shake, as with alarm. ‘Go!’ said her stifled voice, ‘go!’

How he had obeyed her he could not tell. He was striding across the heath,

longing to return to where he had left her, to take her and say, ‘ You are mine, you love me and must yield ; mine as I am yours alone, in life and death ! ’

It was Honor who had conquered for them both. He did turn, but it was only to look his last on Trebarva, set amongst the livid purple of the heath, with the white-edged thunder-clouds above, and grey in the salt air of the dull July day. God bless and comfort her, his love, whom no help of his could avail.

CHAPTER XXIII.

But oh the heavy change now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone and never must return !

LYCIDAS.

YET if he had seen her, whom he had left in the darkened afternoon, his resolution might have failed him.

In his presence, she had struggled for calmness and strength ; but when the need of self-control was over, the power of it left her also : she had not yet recovered from the strain of yesterday's fight with the sea. Her nerves gave way and she sank down by the wide window-seat, her frame shaken by her sobs ; and her tears, unresisted

now, falling hot, and heavy, and fast on her tightly clasped hands.

Gone! And with him all he had brought—the renewed sense of summer and youth and joy. Were all these wrong? As wrong as she knew she must henceforth hold this love to be, which had grown up in her heart unchecked because undreamed of. She felt very old, as old as only the very young can feel, and she was but twenty-one.

Only twenty-one; too young yet, for all her sense of age, to have reached the higher passion, which most human souls can attain only by the stepping-stones of a love that is not yet lifted above the thought of its own sweetness and bitterness. She could not be content, so long as it was well with him she loved, that she

should be apart from him, ignored, forgotten or misprized. Her love was still selfish ; yet through these throes she was striving slowly and unwittingly, yet surely, towards that diviner air where self should be annulled.

She knew now it had been her duty to tell Stephen that much of the truth which concerned him, at the first. She had not dreamed of his loving her ; but Nature does not take account of our ignorance or innocence in reckoning our sins ; and Her punishments fall no less heavily, because the offender pleads ‘I did not know.’ What if Honor’s penance for having let his feet be ensnared in those terrible tangles of her life thread, knotted by her own hand, should be his anger and scorn, when he thought of the return she had made him

for this strong true love that should have been the crown of some worthier woman's life? And yet——Oh, she had no right to love him! But she had loved him, and all was changed.

How could she help holding dear the memory of his voice, of that pleading look which of late had thrilled through her, of the whole sudden flush of quick pleasure, which had brightened and glorified this last brief, long week? She had moved in a dream: she was awake now——never to dream again.

But that dream must never be known to any but herself. Till now she had been reserved, holding her inward self, her emotions, her instincts jealously guarded (her life with Agnes having trained her to reticence) from Mary, and this reserve

should serve her now in keeping the secret which was doubly hers, in that it was Stephen's as well.

She rose and slowly went upstairs to her room ; where she sat till the twilight gathered duskily, and one straggling gleam from the west smote the withered twine of honeysuckle hanging above the mantel-piece.

It must be nearly tea-time ; she did not want Mary or Ruth to miss her ; and she smoothed her rough hair and dashed cold water over her face. Its touch recalled those salt chill waves of yesterday, and she shivered, despite the sultry heat which was growing more oppressive every moment—the forecast of a thunder-storm.

‘ Have you been resting, Honor ? ’ asked

Mrs. Ross, when she came downstairs, with a step which, despite her effort, was listless and weary. ‘You look tired out, my child.’

‘No, only it is so hot—I want air.’

‘Was not Mr. Nugent here? I hoped to see him, but he left so soon.’

So soon! his visit had seemed to Honor like an eternity. ‘I should have come down,’ Mrs. Ross continued, ‘but I saw him going away towards Lynion. I was very sorry, for you told me this was his last day here. Perhaps he will come and say good-bye to-night.’

‘Perhaps,’ Honor answered mechanically.

‘You are not well, dear,’ said her friend anxiously. ‘I am sure you have not got over that terrible time yesterday. I have

never thanked Mr. Nugent yet—and when I think——’ she shuddered.

Was life so great a boon? Honor drearily wondered. The evening closed in, but the heat was so heavy and brooding, she sat in the window-seat by the open casement yearning for a breath of wind. In her desire not to be observed she had taken up a book, and it lay open on her lap, the light from a small lamp on a table by her falling on its open page; but her eyes were fixed on the troubled lurid streaks of light above the dark confused heaving of the sea. Mrs. Ross was engrossed in a novel, rather a rare luxury with her, and consequently much appreciated, when Ruth opened the door.

‘A letter, ma’am, from Lynion; Johnnie Fall brought it over.’

Mrs. Ross opened and read it ; it was from Nugent, a brief note of farewell to her, warm and grateful. Yet it chilled her a little : there was no mention of writing or meeting again, no word of Honor. She handed it to the girl, without saying anything. Honor looked at it with dazed eyes. These were the first words she had ever seen written by Stephen Nugent's hand ; and she would fain have laid her lips to the paper, which she handed back carelessly enough, saying, as she divined what was in her friend's mind, 'We said good-bye this afternoon.'

'How cold she is !' thought Mrs. Ross, 'except with those she really cares for.'

Honor had taken up her book again, and was gazing full at the page, scarcely recking what she read, although ever after

the words then before her recalled the aching, dull misery of that hour.

It was a small anthology she held ; perhaps without knowing it she had instinctively sought out Drayton's wonderful appealing sonnet, for which till now she had cared little, though its music haunted her :

Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part.

Nay, I have done ; you get no more of me.

And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart,

That I so clearly——

A sudden double flash of lightning fell on the page ; and as in one moment she seemed to read the last lines :

Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,

When his pulse failing, passion speechless lies,

When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,

And Innocence is closing up his eyes.

Now, if thou wilt, when all have given him over,

From Death to Life thou mightest him recover.

It was as the cry of her own heart, strangely echoed back from those dead centuries. She felt stifled, and gasped for breath as the thunder crashed overhead, rolling across the sky; and in the pause that followed, she leant out, where a few nights before she had bent to gather the carnations, till in the stillness she felt the great raindrops fall on her upturned face and hot brow.

‘Honor dear! come in; it is not safe!’

She turned for an instant. ‘Let me,’ she pleaded; ‘I never felt a storm before.’

But Mrs. Ross had a wholesome horror of lightning, and insisted firmly on the window being shut. Even then it made her uncomfortable to see Honor standing by it, intently watching the swift blaze of the flashes.

‘It is a worse storm than that one which brought Mr. Nugent here.’

Honor did not answer. It was surely well that this wild night should end the day which had seen their severance—his last day at Lynion. Better so than if the tender evening sky, clear moonlight, and unruffled sea, with sleeping waves and low melody, had recalled those other nights when the star-sown space had seemed so far away and yet so close to the earth and them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Yet till the phantoms flee,
Which that house and heath and garden made dear to
thee erewhile,
Thy remembrance and repentance and deep musings are
not free
From the music of two voices and the light of one sweet
smile.—SHELLEY.

THE summer was gone ; autumn came on and passed, with the brown leaves dropping from the trees, the brown paper from London drawing-room windows. And Nugent let the months go by, without caring to note their change, except from the windows of his studio and his rooms adjoining it. When he had returned to town from Cornwall, the season was nearly over, and, through the sultry heats of

August and September, he felt little inclination to the society of his kind, and still less to leave London again : he might change the sky, but not the mind ; he knew that well enough.

He painted feverishly and constantly, but with little feeling of advance and little care for the future—all he wanted was to recall the past. The creamy reaches of sand ; the mingled richness of the serpentine hues ; the bronze of the seaweed ; the purple mail of the mussel-clad rocks shining in the sun, against the hyaline sea ; the orange-tawny patches of lichen on the grey boulders ; the bloom of the heather ; the faint, rosy radiance of the sea-thrift—all these rose before him, bringing her to mind.

Gradually, as the year wore on, he took up his old life again, only with the aching

weariness of frustrated possibilities never before dreamed of, but now a burden on him. The vision of a pale girl's face flashed on him, from time to time, as lifted to his in a passion of appeal ; breaking in on thought, or action, a need and a desire for evermore.

It was not always thus he saw her. She would come back to him in her defiant moods, her tenderness, her brightness ; while, from afar, he felt her present life grinding on from day to day, as she had foretold. He could distract himself ; the world was all before him, little as the profit of it seemed, set against the loss of her, his soul ; but she, poor child !——

There was the pang : she must weary on alone ; the cry of the wind and sea could bear her no echo of his longing to

comfort her, of his sore pain in her desolation which made him desolate.

He had asked, and she had given, no explanation of her story ; but ignorant as he was of it, no question of any wrong, save perchance rashness or imprudence on her part, ever crossed his mind. The sad purity of voice and eyes told that, even though he had made her sin unwillingly, by his winning her to love him, against the instinct of her nature.

If he might only write ! Why had she made the separation so cruel, so entire ? Yet she was right ; he knew that.

Was his life to drift on like this to the end, into a *dilettante* old bachelorhood, or perchance a loveless marriage ? Anything seemed possible, save only awakening to an interest in life which should make it real

once more, as he had deemed it during those summer days.

People were coming back to town ; his club was filling, and shooting invitations suggested a way of killing time, rather more beguiling than were most ; but the country house existence irked him, and he came back to town, disgusted with sport that was no sport, but carnage—and longing for some few days' tramping over the Cornish moors, after snipe and woodcock.

However, on his return to London, on a chilly November day, after one of these unsatisfactory visits, he found a letter awaiting him, which gave him real, quick pleasure.

Hill Street, Tuesday.

‘ DEAREST STEVE,—Here we are, back at last, bag and baggage, chicks and Geoff and myself—and, oh dear ! if ever I go

travelling again for six months, for my health forsooth, burdened with four children and a husband who hardly knows his own language, let alone foreign tongues, I'm—I'm—— Well, I'm Geoffrey's wife (though my name's not Constance), so I suppose I must do as he pleases.

‘ For himself, he is starting off this very night for Ireland—in order, as he considerably says, to let me get settled down in peace. For real thoughtfulness commend me to a husband. However, I am so glad to get home again that I forgive him ; and as I know he will want to catch a glimpse of you (not a bit because I want to see you myself), do come in and have a scratch meal with us, this evening.

‘ Your loving Sister,

‘ ESTHER STRAHAN.’

‘P.S.—You might have looked us up somewhere, during our wanderings! I had almost forgotten I have a brother—George doesn’t count; one might as well have a blue-book and a ledger bound together; all he is good for, is to make haste and be made a baronet as quick as possible, so that we may bask in his reflected glory.’

Mrs. Strahan was Stephen’s favourite sister, the nearest in age to him, and one of those women who are constant to their early interests and affections, even while husband and children claim most of their lives. She was Stephen’s ideal of a sister, as she would have been most men’s, from the ready sympathy with all his moods, which yet never sought to know their causes. He was of too reserved a nature

to confide the troublous questions of his life even to Esther's tenderness, but it had grown natural to him to turn to her, as the one person 'who, if she did not understand him always, felt for him, and with him.' From his boyhood, even if she had never inspired his ideals, she had never lowered them, which is no small thing to say, regarding the relations betwixt a brother and sister, in these latter days.

She had been ill in the spring, and had spent the time, since then, abroad. Stephen had missed both her and Geoffrey Strahan, who was his friend as well as his sister's husband.

So the dull afternoon was brighter as he wended his way to the cosy house in Hill Street, where he found his sister once more with her household gods, in the

shape of bric-a-brac, around her; and engaged in rearranging them after her own whim and fancy.

Mrs. Strahan sprang to meet him, with a fond pretty affection, which was part of her sweetness, and then returned to the polishing of a pet bit of cloisonné enamel.

‘Business is business,’ she said, ‘and I’ve set my heart on getting these things straight before tea-time; so take that large arm-chair like a good boy, and tell me all you have been doing. It is growing dusk fast, and I shan’t be able to work much longer, for fear of breaking things.’

‘Why need you trouble yourself this way? can’t the servants see to these pots and pans?’

Mrs. Strahan drew herself up, the picture of injured virtue, with a Bow tea-

pot clasped to her heart. 'Stephen!' she exclaimed.

'Well!'

'Did you ever know me neglect my husband?'

'Geoff never told me that you did.'

'I should like to pull your hair! Or my children?'

'Cornelia wasn't in it with you.'

'Thank you; and when you were a boy, whose rabbits and white rats did I always feed when he forgot them?'

'Don't "anticipate the past." But what has all this got to do with my question?'

'Only, how you could think I would leave my china to servants!' and the grieved reproach of Mrs. Strahan's tone was exquisite. 'No, thank you,' as her brother sprang up to help her place the

teapot on the top velvet-covered shelf of a cabinet, 'I believe you are equal to smashing it on purpose.'

'I feel rather like it,' Nugent owned. 'I haven't seen you for nine months, and you can't talk of anything but crockery.'

'I told you to talk, and I would listen. Don't be cross; the china is all right now, and I am going to tack this strip of old Italian work as a mantelpiece drapery. Isn't that lovely colour?' as she displayed it.

'Yes, it's very nice; where did you pick it up?'

'At Milan, at the shop you told me of; and oh, Steve, you should see some lace I got there! Geoff grumbled at my extravagance, but I couldn't resist it.'

'And you enjoyed Italy?'

‘Not at all,’ rejoined Esther decisively. ‘I should like to know who would enjoy anything, when they are dragging about three children and a nurse and no courier?’

‘But Geoff wrote he was trying to spare you all he could.’

‘So he was, dear old boy, and of course made things much worse. In regard to men,’ said Mrs. Strahan, pausing before her work, with a hammer in one hand, a tack in the other, and her head poised critically on one side, ‘I have come to the conclusion that, however good their intentions may be, there is not one who has either German, Italian, or French, sufficient to soften the asperities of the *douane*, or to resist the extortions of porters; and so we poor women!—No; I have told Geoffrey I never travel again, except as a Cook’s

tourist—that is my idea of luxury—every thing seen to for you.’

Stephen laughed. Esther shook her head as if her words were too serious to be treated as a jest, and knocked in another nail with great vigour.

‘But what have you been doing?’ she said. ‘Oh! how often, when I got your letters from Cornwall, I wished we had been there in peace and quietness! No large hotels, no cathedrals, no pictures, no canals, no orange trees, no beggars, no garlic! and then no Kursaals and mineral baths! How I used to envy you!’

‘And no old brocade and laces.’

‘Nonsense! as if one couldn’t pick them up in London;—since Geoff isn’t present to hear me own it. But you painted a great deal, didn’t you?’

‘Pretty well ; will you come round to-morrow and judge for yourself?—come to lunch.’

‘I should like it, if I may bring Daisy.’

‘Of course,’ said Stephen, who was very fond of his sister’s eldest daughter, aged seven.

‘And you will have oysters?’

‘I don’t know ; it depends on how you treat me to-night. Oh ! here is Daisy,’ as the sound of small steps coming rapidly down the stairs, finishing with a tremendous jump and bang at the end of the flight, was followed by the appearance of Miss Daisy Strahan herself.

‘I heard Uncle Steve was here, so I came,’ she announced, with some firmness, and springing on his knee.

‘But where **are** the others?’ asked her

mother. ‘I thought Maudie Hughes was coming to tea with you; you shouldn’t leave your guest, Daisy.’

‘Oh, she’s all right,’ responded Miss Daisy calmly. ‘They are playing bears in a cave, and I’m only the mother, so I pretended to go away to market—as I wanted to see you,’ to Stephen.

‘Quite right, old woman,’ responded her uncle. ‘Are you glad to be back home again?’

Daisy nodded her head emphatically. ‘But I liked the fruit for breakfast,’ she owned.

‘You are your mother’s own daughter,’ said Stephen. ‘Never mind, Daisy, you are coming to lunch to-morrow with me, and mamma wants oysters; what fruit shall I get you?’

‘Melon,’ decided Daisy, after some reflection, ‘and Brazil nuts.’

‘Heaven save your digestion,’ said her uncle. ‘Anything else?’

Daisy thought for a moment. ‘If you get some preserved cherries,’ she remarked, ‘I can bring them and the nuts back, to make a feast with.’

‘Daisy,’ interrupted her mother, ‘you ought to be ashamed of yourself.’

‘Uncle Steve asked me,’ returned Daisy defiantly. ‘Oh, Uncle Steve,’ with a sudden change of tone, ‘weren’t there real caves, where you were, when we were in Italy?’

‘Yes, Daisy, but no bears.’

‘I don’t want the bears,’ said his niece — ‘not when they are real. What were the caves like?’

‘Shall I tell you?’ Nugent was not

looking at the child, but gazing into the red depths of the fire, as if its hollows recalled to him a vision of those lofty caverns of the western shore. ‘Some were very high,’ he said, ‘and you had to bring in great bunches of dry furze to light them up ; the ground was all slippery and wet where the sea had gone out at low tide ; and above, you could see the walls shining with the water, which soaked through from the upper ground ; and beautiful green ferns were growing there, just where a little light came in through the chinks.’

‘Go on,’ said Daisy.

‘Then there was another much more beautiful,’ and Mrs. Strahan wondered at the subdued ring of sad and passionate memory in her brother’s voice. ‘But you

could only get there in a boat, when the sea was very calm, and so green and clear, you could see all the great brown seaweeds below, waving and moving about as if they were alive.'

'Like those in the "Little Mermaid."'

'Just like them; and so we rowed along'—how sweet that 'we' sounded in the speaker's own ears—'till we saw what looked like a big hole in the great red cliffs.'

'And that was the cave?'

'Yes; and as we drew near, we saw that it went far, far into the cliff—so far that no man has ever gone to the end—and the water in the cave was like a beryl—a jewel filled with light; and the fringe of shining dark seaweed lifted and fell with each movement, as our boat glided in;

only it was so still, you could not even hear the water stir.'

'Oh, Uncle Steve! it is like a fairy tale.'

'It was much more like a fairy tale than you can think.' He checked a sigh that rose heavily from his heart. 'All above, the roof was the palest pink, like the inside of a shell, and it deepened lower down into a colour like rose-leaves, till it became a crimson, such as you sometimes see in a sunset, to where it touched the dark line of seaweed, and the green water like the evening sky.'

Daisy drew a deep breath. 'Is it all true?' she asked. 'There ought to have been a fairy.'

'Perhaps there was,' said Stephen, remembering the slight figure in the blue

serge gown, the light firm grasp of the slender wrists on the oars, and the beautiful face upturned to the roseate vault above their heads, in that wonderful hushed silence of the cave.

‘I wonder——’ began Daisy; but her speculations were stopped by the arrival of the afternoon tea equipage and the shaded lamp, and at a sign from her mother she vanished.

Stephen drew up his chair nearer the fire, as Esther began to busy herself over her pretty cups and saucers in the soft light. ‘Why, Essie,’ he said, ‘now I see you, you look younger than ever. Or is it that artful lamp of yours?’

‘Let me see you,’ she said, ‘and then I can judge;’ but as she gazed fully at him, she almost started. Those haggard

lines round his mouth and eyes had not been there when he and she had bidden each other good-bye eight months ago. 'Stephen!' she exclaimed, 'have you been ill yourself?'

'Ill! No! Now, my child, give me a cup of tea, and don't worry yourself.'

Mrs. Strahan obeyed, and took up her position on a stool, in front of the fire, picking up the embers with a tiny pair of brass tongs, while she chatted gaily to her brother, who had thrown himself back into the largest arm-chair of which the room boasted. But she could not help glancing nervously every now and then at Stephen. The change in his expression had struck her painfully; it could not have been more void of expectation thirty or forty years hence, when life would have burnt low.

Mrs. Strahan said nothing at the time; but a week later, her husband, watching her at breakfast while she intently studied the depths of her empty coffee-cup, requested to know her thoughts.

‘Steve,’ she answered concisely.

‘What of him? There’s nothing the matter, I hope?’

‘No, but—don’t laugh, Geoff; I hate you when you do—can’t you see he’s changed of late?’

‘No, I can’t. We none of us grow younger, except you.’ Mrs. Strahan’s obstinately girlish favour and looks, sweet at thirty as at eighteen, were a pet jest with her husband and brother.

‘It isn’t that he looks older, but I am sure he isn’t happy.’

‘What a little woman you are for

whims!’ said Mr. Strahan, as, coming behind his wife, he took her head between his two hands, and kissed her forehead. ‘Don’t you bother about Steve; he is as well as any idle man can be. That’s all that’s the matter with him—want of work; and you see now, after so many years, the disease is beginning to tell.’

‘I wish he would marry.’

‘Yes! that’s your feminine panacea for everything. You women would try it on old Nick himself, and, by Jove, I believe a good many of you would be willing to try the experiment with him.’

‘Don’t be impertinent.’

‘You believe in it as the cure for every masculine ailment. What Steve has wanted all his life is work. He’s too good for the dawdling life he leads.’

‘But he paints, Geoff.’

‘Paints!—pshaw!’ The scorn of Mr. Strahan’s ejaculation was inexpressible. ‘He’d have stuck in a different way, even to that, I can tell you, if idleness had meant starving to him. While you are wishing, you had better wish he had taken his share in the bank and the management of the Calcutta branch, when he had the choice, after your father’s death.’

‘Oh!’ and Esther’s voice told her antipathy to the notion.

‘I know it’s not as pretty or pleasant as the life he leads, but all the same it would have been the making of him.’

Mrs. Strahan sat thoughtful and silent for a few moments; then her question showed a proper wifely respect for her husband’s opinion.

‘Do you think George would still take him into the business?’

‘I can’t tell; it’s hardly likely—but I believe, of the two, you would find George more willing to make the offer than Steve to accept it.’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Strahan, as at once regretful and relieved; for the idea of Stephen going to Calcutta had been an old bugbear to her when it had been mooted years before.

Still she did what she thought her duty, and one evening when her brother had dropped in, and he and she were sitting alone together, she mooted the idea. Stephen stared at her in amazement, then burst out laughing—rather a joyless laugh.

‘What on earth set you on to that?’ he exclaimed. ‘Do you think that banking

comes by nature like "reading and writing"? or what signs have I shown of such born genius for the trade that you want me to take to it at thirty-three? I should like to see George's face if you started the subject: the prodigal's elder brother wouldn't be in it with him.'

'It isn't George; you wouldn't like it yourself.' If Mrs. Strahan was petulant, she was prettily so; and it is annoying, when one has braced oneself to a virtuous resolution, to find one's new-born earnestness treated as a childish fancy, amusing, but nonsensical.

'No, certainly I shouldn't; but why do you want to get rid of me, Essie—you and Geoff?—for I know this wise notion was his before it was yours. Have I bored you so terribly of late?'

‘No, but—’ her tone grew really earnest and pleading, and there was a tremble in her voice which touched him—‘I can’t think what you will do.’

It was as an echo of the vague obstinate questionings which had haunted him long, and more than ever since his parting from Honor. *Cui bono?* Nothing he knew, stood the test, but applying himself to money-getting without other end or aim scarcely seemed a fit or fair solution of the problem which vexed him, and his answer to Esther was light: ‘You talk like a tract—I can’t think what I shall do myself, but I can’t take to bank-books at this time of day. If only Geoff would act on his ideas and start as a model farmer he might engage me as bailiff. But I never knew I seemed such a

Sir Charles Coldstream ; I don't feel like him.'

‘Used up!’ No ; while this fire, which had restored to him his youth by its renewing touch, still burned so passionately in his heart ; only now, alas ! ‘kindling nothing, helping nothing, idly burning away.’

CHAPTER XXV.

And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
That I have much ado to know myself.

Merchant of Venice.

‘HALLO ! Nugent !—Steve !’

Stephen, sauntering along the corridor of the Palladium Theatre, turned on hearing his name. His whole countenance lit up as it met the speaker’s. ‘It’s never you, Archdale !’ he exclaimed, ‘at last !’

‘Isn’t it just ? though sometimes I wonder at myself. It seems so odd to be in England again.’

‘What a globe-trotter you have become ! Where have you turned up from ?’

I haven't even heard of you these three years !'

'I only got back a week ago. I was going to look you up to morrow. I've got such a skin for you, a grisly's—no end of a fellow he was—from the Rockies.'

'Oh, that's where you hail from. I thought you were in India.'

'Here, there, and everywhere ; Canada I sailed from. I say, this business is awful rot ; come along with me and let's have a modest drink and a talk over old days.'

'I can't, I am here with my sister ; her husband's away, and I'm doing escort. By Jove, there's the bell ; I must get back to my seat. See you again after this act.'

Archdale nodded, and Stephen returned to his place by his sister's side. There was yet a minute after he was seated before the

curtain drew up, by which he profited to inform her of his recent encounter with his old school friend.'

'Whom do you think I ran up against in the passage just now, with a beard, and "growed out of knowledge"? Archdale!'

'Why, I didn't know he was in England. When did he come back?'

'A week ago, he says, but we only saw each other for a moment; I'm going out to him again when this act's over; if you don't mind being left.'

'A great deal of difference it would make if I did,' retorted Esther. 'I have been jealous of that young man with regard to you, ever since he came to stay with us, your first Eton holidays. I never could make out how you two, so different, were such friends.'

‘That is why—but you never liked him, Essie.’

‘I hated him,’ responded Mrs. Strahan tersely, ‘and I suppose he returned the compliment, as he lost no opportunity of announcing his conviction that “girls were rot.”’

‘I’m afraid his experience confirmed his theory,’ rejoined her brother, amused at the decisive ‘Serve him right,’ his words called forth from her, followed by an expression of entire disapproval of his friend’s past, and of her consequent want of interest therein. ‘It must be a good three years since he left England,’ continued Stephen. ‘I know when I came back after my last long wandering in foreign parts, three years after I had written to congratulate him, I found he had started off to some

unknown region after big game, and saw or heard nothing of him till to-night. I never could make head or tail of the story, Essie. Was he very much cut up, poor old boy?’

‘I can’t say. Hush! the curtain’s going up.’

Stephen watched the players, listlessly at first, and yet grew interested in the piece despite faults which struck him more sharply than they had ever done before—the lack of truth to nature in parts of the play; the heightening of the effect of certain situations at the expense of the piece as a whole.

And yet this love story passing on the stage seemed to Nugent’s fancy to hold an echo of his own; but oh the difference of this reflection of life’s loveliest joy, its

rarest pain, from that reality, the memory of which it yet recalled ! How unlike was this girl, whose mimic woe yet permitted of her remembering the right disposal of the drapings of her elaborate gown ; with her artistically tinted face, and her voice tired into falsetto by the long, trying scene, to Honor—pale, with the heavy saddened eyes, and low dragging voice, which would remain with him for evermore !

And yet it brought it all back, and he felt the truth of such art as was true in the scene, far more quickly than he would have done six months before. He was one with the play, not alien to it ; a vague notion came to him that love may teach not *égoïsme à deux*, but a wider sympathy with the men and women of the real world, whereof this playhouse was the tinted

shadow—falsely coloured perhaps, yet with a relation to the truth he had never felt before—even as it had guided him to sympathy with the feigned story of these who were merely players.

‘Are you interested, Steve?’ asked his sister, whose own pretty eyes were tearful by the time the act-drop fell again. Esther’s simple emotions were readily awakened and sought little disguise; yet she felt her own interest in the men and women of the play more justified as her brother answered, ‘Yes.’

She turned again to study her playbill, endeavouring to gather a forecast of the story’s sequel from the scene of the next act and the Tennysonian quotation affixed thereunto, while Stephen again sought his friend in the smoking gallery.

Archdale declined—rather to Nugent's amusement—his invitation to come round and renew his acquaintance with Mrs. Strahan, on the plea that he had almost forgotten how to speak to a lady.

‘Then the sooner you remember the better.’

‘That's a question,’ returned Archdale gloomily. ‘Anyhow, your sister doesn't want me, and I should only bore her. Can't you look me up to-morrow, old Stiffun?’ with a laugh, as the old Eton nickname came out as half familiar and half forgotten by both. ‘I'm going out of town the day after, for Christmas, to the people of a young fellow who came home with me from Canada. He'd been out there to see his brother who is quartered there. Hunsdon, his governor, has a

place somewhere near Leamington. It will be the first hunting I've had for four years.'

'Tigers,' suggested Nugent; 'and your friends the grislies.'

'Oh, they don't count—at least, not in that way,' said Archdale. 'I've taken my old rooms in Jermyn Street. They are jolly diggings enough, and they have an Al cook there now. I can give you as good a dinner as we could get at the club. I haven't shaken down quite yet, or got things to rights; but you won't mind that, and we can haul over the things I picked up at one place and another. Talking of grislies, do you think Mrs. Strahan would care for one of their skins, or a buffalo rug, or anything of that kind?' the young man inquired doubtfully. To him Esther was rather an alarming person, when he recol-

lected several youthful passages-at-arms between them, wherein he had come off second best.

‘She will be delighted,’ said Nugent ; ‘but you will have to call and offer it yourself. There’s that confounded bell again.’

‘Well, I’m off; ta ta ! I can’t stand this sentimental stuff. Remember to-morrow—eight sharp—you know the number of old.’

‘I ought to do so. Good night, old boy.’

CHAPTER XXVI.

Cloud was on my eyes
And thunder in my ears at that first word.

In a Balcony.

IN former days Nugent had often enough heard the chimes at midnight in these rooms of Archdale's; and of late years, when he passed along Jermyn Street, he frequently glanced up at the windows, with a half-amused, half-regretful memory of those hours and of his host. There was something of real enjoyment in finding himself once more springing up the familiar staircase and meeting Archdale's cheery 'Here you are at last!' at the landing.

‘Yes, it seems like old times. Hallo! though——’ as the transmogrified aspect of the well-known rooms met his eyes; then he burst out laughing. ‘I forgot,’ he said, ‘*you* have returned, but your old belongings haven’t. Somehow I expected to find the place look just as it used to do.’

‘So it will,’ quoth Archdale, ‘when I’ve been here a month or two. Of course the old chairs and tables have gone the deuce knows where, but these will be all right when they’ve been knocked about a bit.’

Nugent laughed again. ‘I see some old friends though,’ he said; ‘I remember those Alken prints in your room at Drury’s.’

‘Yes, I had a lot of my old traps, which

had been stored away, sent round here to-day,' answered his friend. 'And I'm hanged if I know what to do with them,' glancing round at several piles of pictures, books, stag's-horns, sticks, murderous weapons of the barbaric order, and an utterly indescribable confusion of odds and ends, in one corner of the room. 'I had better have made a clean sweep of them along with the rest of the things, after all.'

A meaning in his words, probably not intended by the speaker himself, struck Nugent rather sadly, but his reflections were cut short at that instant by the advent of dinner.

The cook justified Archdale's praise, and as the latter's judgment in the matter of wines had always been more reliable than that of most of the 'fair' young gentlemen,

his peers,' by the time the walnuts and olives were placed on the table, Nugent took a more roseate view of existence than he had done for some time, as he turned his chair towards the fireglow.

As before said, he and Archdale had been fast friends since Eton days, and Raleigh's warning as to the non-endurance of boyish friendships had proved false in this case, as in many others; perhaps because the two men's liking had never touched the point of passionate enthusiasm where friendship reaches love, and so often recoils into indifference. Had they first met as men, it might never have existed at all, but the store of old boyish memories shared between them had strengthened the friendship into a cord, not quickly broken, and their reliance on each other's

loyalty was strong, as it had been in boyhood.

To-night the spell of the past seemed to hold them both ; they called up old days, laughed over old scrapes and jokes. Perhaps neither man cared to talk of his life of the last few years, and Nugent did not wish to allude to that story of his friend's past, of which he had but a vague idea—but suddenly an accident brought him face to face with it.

He had been lazily sauntering round the room, inspecting at Archdale's request some of his friend's new arrangements and possessions, when after looking at a picture above a table piled with heterogeneous matters, his eye fell on a photograph half concealed by loose letters and papers tossed above it. Some recognition of the

brow and eyes—all he could see of the portrait—made him instinctively take it up.

‘What are you looking at?’ said Archdale, turning round where he sat, to flip his cigarette ash into the grate. ‘Oh, that! I came across it this morning, overhauling my despatch-box. You know who it is?’

Yes, Nugent knew; felt, somehow, as if he had known it long, and that that which he had dreaded had come upon him, as he gazed at Honor’s portrait, hearing as from afar Archdale’s words:

‘My wife.’

Yet, was it possible? He stood stupidly staring at the eyes which appealed from the picture to him and to his love, as though asking, ‘Do you understand now?’

Did he? some dim sense of the revolt

of her nature, some instinct of the meaning of her passionate cry, 'You could not understand,' reached him, as he stood there, holding that poor, faded semblance of her in his hand, and heard his own voice saying naturally enough to Archdale—

'I knew nothing about it, you know.'

'No, you were abroad the whole time; I suppose just because you were the one fellow I wanted and would have spoken to about it, and I never was good at writing. But you know as much as any one does, thanks to me. Here's the coffee—have some? No; a *chasse* then?'

His guest took the proffered glass of *fin champagne*; the servant's entrance with the coffee had given him time to collect his thoughts. He must learn more

of this strange game Fate had played with him ; and in truth Archdale appeared willing to enlighten him, as far as was in his power.

Nugent, standing by the mantelpiece, was stirred both by anger and a bitter cynical amusement, despite the turmoil of his own mind, as he marked Archdale's appreciative disposal of his coffee and *chasse*, and his deliberate selection of a cigarette, ere he began to tell the story of his marriage, of the wreck of Honor's life, as coolly as he might have recounted his losses at Newmarket—or so it seemed to the other man's impatient, torturing pain.

‘How much have you heard?’ Archdale asked, pulling up his chair to the fire and glancing up at Stephen, who stood near

him, his hand moving his empty liqueur-glass backwards and forwards on the mantelshelf, his face turned away from his companion.

‘I suppose the same as most people’—his very inward tumult, the anger and scorn Archdale’s coolness woke within him, aided him to echo the latter’s careless tone. ‘That you married a wife and—you and she didn’t hit it off.’

Archdale nodded.

‘That’s about all anyone can tell you—I don’t know that I can add much to it myself.’

‘Could your wife?’ The strain was so hard, that he could scarcely believe but Archdale must note his unreal manner, his repressed eagerness; but he did not. It was only by a strong effort Stephen forced

himself to speak the words, feeling himself a traitor to Honor to mention her thus, to listen while Archdale—— Oh, God! the whole world seemed without form and void.

‘I’m hanged if she could tell you more than I can, and that’s the muddle of the whole affair,’ rejoined Archdale placidly. Let it be remembered that the story of his brief married life had now been familiar to him nearly four years, though Nugent did not take this into account. ‘You remember my writing to you about my engagement, and telling you about Miss Denne and her step-mother, that pretty fair little woman—a cat if ever there was one—who afterwards married Sir Robert Field? Haven’t you ever met her?’

‘Sometimes. I used to know Field

rather well.' Strange that, after all, his life might nearly have touched Honor's in this London world that seemed so far removed from her. He remembered now to have heard that Archdale's wife was Lady Field's daughter.

'Well, 'ware snakes, if ever you come across her path! She chose, before I was married—— Oh, hang it, I'm a bad hand at telling a story from the right end—but you knew about me and Addie Vernon?'

A slight weary movement of Nugent's gave assent. To hear of that woman dragged into Honor's story—oh! it was hard!

Well, when I broke off with her, of course, after her kind, she took to writing anonymous letters to Mrs. Denne, as she was then. She'd gone to the right person,

too. I'll be hanged if that woman,' quoth Archdale, with a virtuous indignation which aroused a moment's sarcastic amusement in Nugent—'instead of flinging them into the fire, didn't ferret out the whole matter. It wasn't very difficult; there were men and women enough who could tell her all she wanted to know, and if she had come to me I'd have settled her soon enough, by offering to tell Norah the whole affair, swearing on my honour it was all off, and giving her her choice whether she'd have me or not. But that wouldn't have suited my lady's game. She liked to think she had me, in a way, in her power, for she was quick enough to know that I saw through her; but, all the same, she wanted to get rid of Norah, and she could do that through me. The girl had odd notions,

and knew no more of the world than a baby, and I think Mrs. Denne was frightened that, if it all came out, Norah would throw me over.'

'Oh, Honor! Honor! poor child!' was the sob of Nugent's heart.

'What I believe she did, was just to poison the girl's mind against me, so as to make her keep a watch on me, as *she* would have done'—something of Archdale's coolness left him now, as he rose, as if to emphasise his words. 'By God, I swear to you, Stephen, I can't understand it otherwise. You've known me long enough. Do you think I could be unkind to any woman, let alone a wife I had just married?'

Unkind? no! but that he should be Honor's husband, when every word told

how alien his nature was to hers, so that sympathy with her or comprehension of her seemed utterly impossible to him ! Yet there was something pathetic in Rex Archdale's appeal, which wrung a loyal and kindly answer from Nugent, despite his own pain.

‘No, old boy !’ He could say no more.

‘Then what on earth made her act as she did, unless her step-mother had primed her to keep a sharp look-out on me?—it's the only explanation. Addie, confound her, wrote a letter which followed me to Paris ; Honor must have got hold of it, and she left me in a fit of temper.’

Archdale had so long accepted this explanation himself, that he had come to regard it as the established truth ; but as he went on to recount the circumstances

under which Honor had left him, Nugent wondered yet more at the blindness of this man, who knowing and loving Honor in his own way, could yet imagine her playing the spy on him, and not be sure that, had she deemed him guilty of faithlessness or treachery, she would have told him so frankly.

Stephen could understand the truth of her story better from Rex's idea thereof, built on a mistaken premise as to her nature, than he might have done otherwise ; even as a false hypothesis may, by its demonstrated absurdity, prove the truth.

‘And then?’ he asked, as Rex paused, after telling him how on his return from the Gymnase, that night in Paris, he found Honor gone.

‘ Well, I saw how matters were at once, and I started off after her. I knew she was up to no harm, and I felt I had been a fool to leave that letter knocking about. But all the same, I didn’t mean to let her off too easily ; I can tell you, I was in the devil’s own temper with her for making such a to-do and behaving like a mad woman. If I had caught her up, on the way, I suppose it would have been all right ; there would have been no end of a row, and we should have got on all the better after it ; but as luck would have it, I took the wrong route, and the day I got to London I found her flown. I’d been working myself up all the way over here, and had made up my mind, that, as she had chosen to leave me, so she might come back to me if she chose, but I wouldn’t ask

her to do so. She was in the wrong, not I, and she deserved "what for."

Nugent sharply turned and walked up and down the room. 'Well?' he said at last.

'Well, what I found in London made matters much worse. Instead of drawing out some money (her own was all settled on her), I'll be hanged if she mustn't go and make gossip by her folly, in getting her jewels from the bank and taking them to the jeweller's to sell. Of course, I hushed it up as well as I could, said it was all right, got the things back, and sent them to the bank as if nothing had happened; but I always feel those fellows can talk about it. It made me so mad, I vowed I wouldn't take another step towards putting matters straight. I found

out soon enough whither she had flown—to an old governess of hers, at a God-forsaken place somewhere near the Land's End. She couldn't come to much harm there.'

'You never wrote, or went to her, then?'

'Confound it, no. It was she who had made the fuss, and it was her place to come to me—besides, I didn't want her back against her will. But I did all I could to stop tongues. I went to Mrs. Denne and found that, so far, she had no idea of all the row, or whither Honor had gone. I told her that my wife was all right, and then I thought she might as well hear a few wholesome truths, and told her it was all her fault, though I left her to guess how. Of course she wanted to know where Honor was, but I requested her to let the

poor girl alone ; Norah and I could manage our own affairs, and should end by being very good friends. I didn't let her guess how my wife had left me, and made her promise not to bother Norah, unless my wife wrote to her first. She's an awful coward, and I hinted that, if she did, I'd know the reason why ; and besides that, she was so afraid that Field or anyone should blame her, that she caved in at once, and I knew I could trust to her telling all sorts of lies I should never have thought of, to persuade people there was no smoke, let alone no fire.' Archdale laughed grimly. 'She has lied too, like fun ; I've heard such stories she's told people of Norah's liking a country life and my devotion to sport, that, by Jove, I've admired her. But she's wasted on Field ; he's one of those men who would

believe in her just the same if she told the truth.'

‘ Was that how you went abroad ? ’

‘ Yes; what was I to do at home? I couldn't quite go back to my old ways, and I thought my wife would come round sooner than she has done, and then if she found she had to wait a little before she could get at me by letter, or hear from me, it would do her no harm.’

His tone, his words, jarred inexpressibly on Nugent, who yet saw through Rex's story, that the latter had shown no little consideration for the wife who had left him : no little carefulness for her fame. Better and wiser men than Archdale would not have acted, in his case, as wisely and well as he had done. Nugent knew how freely, in the vague disconnected accounts of the

story which he had heard, the blame had been lavished on Archdale, by those who knew nothing of the matter, save what Rex himself had chosen to say.

Stephen recognised what Rex's words did not even imply, how carefully the young husband had shielded his wife from blame, with a chivalry, for which few men or women would have given him credit. Doubtless this trait had sprung from the same obstinate pride which made him resolute that the woman who had left him of her own free will should of her own free will return to him and acknowledge her fault; but blended with this was that nobler instinct, he himself scarcely recognised, which better men than himself might have lacked, which forbade him to force back an unwilling woman to her place by his side.

But his friend understood something of it, and this made him pause ere he asked Rex—

‘ Did you care for her ? ’

‘ More than I ever thought I did. And you never saw her. You can’t tell from that photo. what she was really like. She beat them all hollow, I can tell you ; there was something about her, one couldn’t forget. Sometimes now I see her eyes, and wonder what the end will be. I say, I’ve bored you with my affairs a full hour, and your throat must be as dry as a bone ; mine is, I know, with all this talking.’

CHAPTER XXVII.

My soul, like to a ship in a black storm
Is driven, I know not whither.

VITTORIA CORROMBONA.

‘Was it true?’ Nugent found himself wondering as he left his friend’s house, ‘or only the heated fancy of his brain?’

Honor, Reginald Archdale’s wife! this was the irony of life. Till now, despite his knowledge of her marriage, she had seemed all his in thought. The vague image of the husband she did not love, had been enough, like a jealous ghost, to wave them back from Love’s Eden—to make clasped hands and meeting eyes forbidden,

even as was any closer sacrament of love ; but it had not been enough to prevent him holding her in his thoughts, with the memory of that moment's sweet madness on the rocks, which had made death seem 'soft, as the loosening of wound arms in sleep.'

Now all was changed. It was Rex Archdale, the man he had known and liked so long, who had trusted him all these years, who held this right which Nugent could not deny, although his whole heart rebelled against it.

A woman might have cried out, 'She does not love him ; he has no right over her !' But the man's instinct admitted the husband's claim, even while his soul sickened at it. If things were different, if he ignored that claim, and so, defying its power, won Honor—his darling and his

treasure—to have and to hold, despite the law of God and man—he would still feel the right lay with Rex, that he had stolen what was not his from his friend.

‘Oh, but is it not hard, dear?’ that cry which finds an echo in the hearts of most men and women, at some moments of their lives, rose in a sob now, almost to Stephen’s lips. He could not tell what he was to do; it was all dark, dark as the murky, fog-reddened air around him. He tried to forget it all, for just a moment to remember Honor as he had seen her first, with that untamed, fierce, innocent bearing, which told of the untamed, fierce, innocent heart. It came back to him how those bright clear eyes had grown soft, that proud mouth tender, the whole lovely transformation a month had seen, which had made his joy

and pride; the guerdon of his love—his love of her who was Archdale's wife!

And with all his friendship for Rex, all his honest recognition of the other man's loyalty and frankness and honesty, ever deeper sank the sting of the thought for her. She, married to Archdale, who had held and used women as toys, who demanded their price, and demanded no more, to whom the eternal womanhood had been an unknown word, undenied because unimagined!

Even now, Stephen could not understand how it had come about. Oh, he supposed Rex's good looks and *bon-homie* had attracted the girl; it was natural enough. But afterwards? As he thought of that poor child alone and amazed in Paris, with that man who had

so little in common with her, the intuition, born of love, aided him only too easily to understand her wild flight, the outcome of her wild despair.

And she was Rex Archdale's wife !

The words forced themselves into a grotesque refrain, set to the accompaniment of the London noises, the rolling of the wheels, the shouts of the drivers, as he made his way homeward through the frost and fog. She was his queen, his love, whose eyes were a living fire of scorn of base thought, or low desire. She was his darling, whose heart he knew held his strong idea for ever and aye as the inmost thought in that sweet shrine—and she was Archdale's wife !

He might end all this, if only, when the morning broke, he left behind him the

weariness, the fever, and the fret, where each man's moan is the echo of a thousand others, uncared for and unguessed of by him, and found his way again across those lonely moors to her.

If he did this, and, taking her in his arms, said, 'Oh, I know all; let the world go by, so you and I cling together,' surely she would not say him nay! Might not this be the end? as good an end as any other for him and for her—Archdale's wife.

God forbid! Let the world say what it would, that he heeded not; but that her eyes should ever be less proudly pure, that the lines of those sweet lips should harden with shame, and that true soul be dragged down, degraded by him—a thousand times God forbid!

Yet the temptation abided. A dim

feeling that Archdale's story forced action upon him, troubled him with unrest, till at last he fell asleep.

And, in dreams, he saw Honor again, coming to him across the moor, transfigured in the sunset; the glory of the sky, and the clouds, and the deep, lurid glow of the heather like vapour and flame, around her; and as she neared him, he read in the passion of her eyes, the triumph of her smile, the assurance that Archdale's tale was but a foolish, ghastly dream; so wondered at his past trouble. She was free, and they drew nearer, nearer; the night fell suddenly—and Nugent woke.

Woke to the darkness of a London fog and the knowledge that his man had been into the room, with a candle, had left his shaving-water, and, finding his master

asleep, had vanished silently. This was the stuff of which were made the glow and darkness of his dream. A short bitter laugh escaped him as he realised its texture, but Honor's image did not fade so soon.

All through the day it haunted him, pathetic, appealing, till he was fain to cry out, 'What shall I do?' as the instinct that his hour had come ever gathered force within him, even while he felt blind and helpless as to whither his steps were led.

Oh! weary day which, dragging out its bitter hours, found him, when the gloomy sunset reddened through fog clouds in the west, still brooding beside his studio fire. All round him, in the growing darkness, were the pale memories of those

Cornish days. For hours he had been there, in fancy, remembering how each sketch had been painted, how Honor had pleased in them, or criticised, with the true eye that long gazing at those cliffs and waves had given her.

Before him was a water-colour sketch of her face, half taken from memory and from pencil scratches made in his sketch-book, when she did not know. The little book was full of such hints of her beauty, from that first one he had made that day she had passed him on the heath; the turn of her neck, the lovely line of cheek and ear; the full curve of the eyelids when drooped, their clear slight arch above the eyes when her direct gaze grew fixed and intense; all these met him again, as he listlessly turned over the

leaves ; and now the book rested on his knee, open at one sketch of her that recalled her look that night in the moonlight, when he spoke of his belief in a moment that should redeem, or condemn life. But how could this present moment possibly be his ordeal? He could do no good to Honor or himself ; and as to Archdale—what did he owe him? what claim could friendship, honour, loyalty, put in here, before the mighty and terrible countenance of love?

The fire fell in with a crash ; a few moments before, it had looked as an airy crimson palace, with glowing delicate minarets and spires, and arches, roseate and transparent with the light and heat which had shaped it into being ; now it was a black and red ruin, with a veil of fine

grey ashes slowly gathering on the dulling cinders, which a minute before had been the heart of its heat and radiance.

With a heavy sound, between a sigh and a groan, Stephen roused himself. He was engaged to a big dinner at his elder brother's; he supposed he must go; Essie would say it was his duty.

Duty! the word suddenly struck him from the midst of his careless, half-sarcastic conclusion, like a separate thought, sharp and powerful, and mighty to avenge all sins against itself and the Eternal Law whereof it was the servant. As he had confessed to Honor, he had paid little heed to its voice through all these years; and even now, he thrust from him the conviction that its bidding was speaking within him, in words which grew ever clearer and

clearer, and would not be gainsaid, albeit he might disobey them. He knew not how it was, that suddenly he saw the right path clear before him, and his heart cried out he neither could nor would walk therein. It was so hard for him; harder, harder, and more terrible for her!

He to force her feet upon the thorns from which she shrank! He to bid her ——! No, he could not do this thing.

If this were duty, why then Mephisto was the true critic of a world, where right could wear a face by the cynical smile and sneer of which, the sin which sinned openly through love seemed lovely and noble. Duty! its right name was Juggernaut; the monster beneath whose car fair impulses and instincts, beauty, strength, and youth were crushed into one shapeless, quivering.

hideous mass—to what avail? What happiness, what good, should be wrought through the victim's agony?

God knew, he only wished the best for her; but this, which she dreaded as worst, could never be best.

Ah, leave her as she was, in peace if not in happiness, her soul guarded from pain and peril, his thought still with her, although he might never see her face again!

And yet—and yet——

What right had he to wish this for her, Archdale's wife?

None; his soul answered the question directly, sternly, through all the tempest within him of doubt and question, temptation and struggle, and the passion which was awake with him, fiercer than it had

been since that day when its pain seemed to blind him, as his half-conscious steps led him away from Honor, across the moorland. Strong and terrible it rose within him now, to conquer or be conquered by the love of which it yet was part.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Let the event,
That never-erring arbitrator, tell us
When we know all ourselves, and let us follow
The becking of our chance.— *Two Noble Kinsmen.*

THERE must have been something wrong with Nugent's watch, or he must have dressed more quickly than usual, for when he arrived at his brother's house, the hands of the large Tompion clock on the staircase—one of his sister-in-law's, Isabel Nugent's, most cherished household gods, having been picked up for 'a mere nothing'—pointed to a quarter to eight, and, on entering the drawing-room, he found the host and hostess alone, Mrs. Nugent still employed in drawing on the second of her

almond Suède gloves, with their interminable buttons, and her husband enjoying a hasty glance at the special *Globe* in the back room.

‘I’m glad it’s you, Steve,’ he said, coming forward to welcome his brother ; ‘you are in good time for once in a way. Nasty night, isn’t it ? Beastly fog !’

‘Abominable !’ answered Stephen, with what appeared like a grim satisfaction in the fact, in his tone.

‘I hope it won’t prevent people coming,’ said Mrs. Nugent, with some anxiety. ‘Is it bad enough for that ?’

‘I don’t think so, and it is a thaw, thank goodness ;’ both men laughed at the relieved expression of Isabel’s face, as she returned to the smoothing down of her immaculate hand-gear.

‘It’s all very well for you to laugh,’ she observed, with perfect good temper, ‘but you know as well as I do how horrid it is to have the table put out. Stephen, do be an angel and button this glove for me. George’s fingers are all thumbs. Thank you. I hope it won’t make people late,’ she went on as, the operation completed, she went to the window and pulled aside the heavily-gathered blind of pale yellow silk, to judge of the dense air outside, with the glare of the gas-lights struggling through the fog, then wandered into the adjoining room to rearrange some flowers, which struck her eye as being wrong.

The two brothers stood together, neither apparently much inclined to talk, the one examining his nails with profound interest, the other staring down with equal absorp-

tion at his shoes. At last George Nugent, with an effort, aroused himself to the extent of uttering an exhaustive 'Well?'

'Well!' echoed Stephen, looking up from the hearth-rug.

His brother laughed. 'I'm afraid I'm as dull as the fog,' he said, 'but we are rather in a fix at the bank, and I don't see my way out of it.'

Stephen was somewhat astonished at this confidence on his brother's part, as George was not apt to wax expansive about business to anyone.

'Nothing serious, I hope?'

'No'—George broke into a cheery and comfortable laugh, which spoke volumes for the standing of the house of Nugent Bros. 'It's only a bother. Mitcheson—our Calcutta manager, you know—his health

has broken up altogether. It's not the climate, but he never was a strong man; and now, I should say, poor fellow, he won't last through the voyage, and we don't know whom to send out in his place.'

'Can't you promote the head clerk out there?'

'That's just what we don't want to do, if we can help it. I know the fellow; he only went out there six years ago, and he is one of those men who make good servants, but bad masters. He's up to the work thoroughly, but he has not enough weight; and what one wants is a man to have the authority and look after things generally. Of course,' said George, with a touch of old resentment, 'it's the place you ought to have taken, as the governor

always meant. He never intended me to have all the halfpence.'

'Or all the work, dear old boy,' answered Stephen, laying his hand for a moment on his brother's shoulder. He was keenly touched by the generosity which he knew had always been at the root of George's vexation at his declining the place in the bank which had been left to his choice. Then the idea flashed on him, was this the way to cut the knot which troubled him so sorely?—to sever himself thus utterly and assuredly from Honor for years? The sudden resolve brought a sudden relief, as, without giving himself time to consider, or doubt, or debate, he said—

'Could I take it now?'

His brother stared at him as amused

by the jest; then, noting Stephen's face, asked—

‘Do you mean it?’

‘I suppose so. Yes.’

‘But you know nothing of the work.’ The doubt showed his wish to overcome the objection.

‘I have an idea of it, and I think, if I set my mind to it, I could manage it.’

‘If you set your mind to it, yes—but what on earth has put it into your head after you have hated it like poison all your life?’

‘Essie!’ said Nugent, with a strange, short laugh.

‘I wish she had done so fifteen years ago, instead of helping to set you against it,’ growled his brother. ‘There’s somebody coming; we’ll talk more of it when they

have all gone ; that is'—with a doubtful glance at his brother—'if you are really in earnest.'

Stephen wondered himself if he were. Had he signed his own sentence of exile without reflection or forecast? He was roused from pondering, however, by the announcement of Sir Robert and Lady Field.

He started : the curious way in which the facts of our lives sometimes gather, like waves, all towards one central point, struck him now. He had met Lady Field before, but had taken little note of her ; now he observed her with keen interest, as she entered the room, wondering what her real part had been in the story of Honor's life.

'Ware snakes!' Was Rex's warning

born of prejudice, or of the discernment by which a man of his kind may divine a woman of the order to which he had represented Mrs. Denne as belonging? The pretty, tender-eyed woman, who sat nearly opposite Nugent at dinner, with that lovely serenity of expression wherewith the consciousness of being the best-dressed woman in the room always dowered Agnes, looked as if she might, indeed, have been too young and yielding to be an ideal guardian for a girl; but gentle, sweet, affectionate—she must be these, surely!

Yet Rex had inferred that she had never possessed Honor's confidence. What was the truth?

As Stephen looked at her and noted her gaze at the man to whom she was talking, the evasive, caressing softness of the eyes,

the contrast between her glance and Honor's, straightforward in shyness as in candour, struck him. One was falsehood, the other truth. In that memory of his love's, Agnes's face held no fairness for him.

Mrs. Strahan, who was sitting further down the table, opposite to Stephen, was less contented than ever with her younger brother's appearance. His next neighbour was a very young girl just out, and, although he paid her all needful attention, Esther could see the young lady's shyness was by no means lessened by Nugent's evidently forced conversation. Mrs. Strahan was amused and rather irritated. 'What a miserable time she is having, poor child!' she thought. 'He is making her more nervous every moment by her conviction that she is boring him, whereas he

is only boring himself. And he can be so pleasant ! I should like to shake him.'

But since this benevolent desire could not be fulfilled, at all events at present, she devoted herself, when the ladies had left the dining-room, to Stephen's late companion, with such good effect in alleviating the agony of shyness which had grown on that damsel all through dinner, that, by the time the men made their appearance in the drawing-room, the girl was chatting freely to Mrs. Strahan, telling her of her brothers at school, her study of the violin, her enjoyment of her enfranchisement from the schoolroom, with a frank confidence in her new friend's interest therein which pleased the elder woman. Stephen saw them as he entered the room—the sweet, kindly womanhood of his

sister's face, the bright freshness of the girl's, from which all shyness and self-consciousness had vanished.

‘You are a witch, Essie,’ he said, with something of tender admiration, as later on he took the seat from which the poor little maiden had been ousted by some request to come and look at some collection of etchings for which she did not care a straw. ‘I tried to get on with that young lady, but failed. How did you manage?’

‘Not by looking like a wolf determined to play at being grandmamma,’ retorted Esther sarcastically. ‘I never saw you trying to make yourself amiable before, and I hope I never may again. If you can’t be agreeable without such an effort, I should advise you to stay at home.’

Stephen laughed, but didn’t seem in-

clined to answer his sister's reproaches. He took up her fan and furled and unfurled it, till she, with some decision, removed it from his hands.

‘No,’ she said determinedly. ‘It was Geoff’s birthday present, and is the only real old, valuable one I possess. I don’t want it broken just to gratify your passion of fidgeting with something or another. I intended to give you a lecture after dinner, and tell you to go and try if you couldn’t make yourself more pleasant to poor Miss Gresham; but I suppose you would rather talk to Lady Field?’

The fine satire of Mrs. Strahan’s tone was edifying; it had that peculiar ring in it which, when one woman is alluding to another, means ‘I know she is charming; the whole world says so, and the world must

be right. If I don't agree with it, that is nothing.'

'Why?'

'Only that you were looking at her so often during dinner, I really meant to give you a second lecture on staring.'

'You don't think she noticed it?'

'She wouldn't mind it if she did.' Mrs. Strahan's powers of sarcasm were not large, and were exhausted for the present, as was proved by her reply to her brother's next question. 'Do you like her?'

'I can't bear her! I mean,' she explained, rather penitently, 'I don't know much of her; but I don't trust her, and I am sure she isn't true. Why, don't you remember, it was that beautiful girl, her step-daughter, your friend Archdale married, that year you were abroad?'

You were mentioning it only the other night.'

He wondered how he kept his voice clear and natural, while his heart was throbbing so thickly that it seemed to choke utterance, as he answered, 'Well?'

'Well, you never saw Honor Denne, but I did; and I am sure that that woman'—quoth Esther, with a glance of very frank dislike at Lady Field, where she sat, her fair hair and her rich-hued brocade gown thrown out effectively against a large screen of stamped and gilt Spanish leather—'I'm not abusing her just because she is pretty and fascinating, as you men always think we do, but her younger sister, Theo Searle, was a great friend of mine, and she used to say Agnes had been the worst tyrant at home that a girl could be;

always got her own way against the others, and never gave them an excuse to grumble.'

'I don't see how that could be,' said Nugent, with some show of reason.

'Then you have never known a woman who was both selfish and false. I know all the Rainforths were glad enough when Agnes married Mr. Denne; and Theo used to tell me of this girl Honor, and say she was sure Agnes was jealous of her and spited her.'

Mrs. Strahan's schoolgirl epithet seemed amusingly inappropriate, as referring to any possible action of the fair, delicate-featured lady near then, looking like a Lippo Lippi angel against the great gold screen; but Nugent did not smile.

‘Then they went abroad,’ continued Esther, ‘and Theo went to India with her husband, and I never saw anything more of the Dennes till three years later, when Honor came out.’

‘You knew her then?’ Oh cursed fate, that had stayed him abroad that summer! He might have met Honor; they might have loved then, and life and fate and the world had all been changed!

‘Whom? Honor? Yes; but I never could see much of her. I remembered all Theo had told me, and other things I can’t remember now, and I thought I should like to be friends with her. She was difficult to get on with at first, but I felt there was something in her that was worth knowing; and then she didn’t look happy, and’—a faint, pretty blush touched Mrs.

Strahan's cheek—'she was so beautiful. I used to wish you could—paint her. Don't you remember how I wrote and wanted you to come home?'

Yes, Stephen remembered.

'Of course it's all so long ago now, and you mightn't have liked each other, and Geoffrey always teased me about match-making; but I quite hated Mr. Archdale when I heard he was engaged to her. I couldn't really get to know her well, for one never saw her alone. I am sure Mrs. Denne did not mean her to make friends with anyone, and that she brought about that marriage. The girl wasn't in love with her husband—she proved that; and unless she accepted him because she was so unhappy, Mrs. Denne ought to have kept her from marrying a man she did not care

for, if she was such a child as not to know better herself.'

'I suppose she was,' said Stephen. It sounded like an indifferent comment on Esther's story, but his sister's words, 'such a child,' were to him the conclusion of the whole matter.

Honor had been a child then ; she was one no longer, but a woman grown into her full being through these lonely years, in whom pain and love had both wrought their work, and must work it till the end.

'One thing,' Esther went on, 'I am quite certain of ; that is, that Lady Field and her step-daughter know nothing of each other now ; and I am sure Lady Field hates Mr. Archdale, though I can't tell why. I remember one day, when some tactless woman mentioned the Archdales to her,

she sighed that pretty little sigh and said, "Poor dear Honor, if I had only known soon enough what I have heard of him since, I should never have allowed the marriage! Though I'm afraid my poor child was so headstrong, she would have had her own will in spite of me"—or something like that. She always generalises in that way when she doesn't know what to say.

"Women 'ware women,"' quoted her brother, with a hard, slight laugh. Esther looked up at him, rather pained and surprised.

'Do you think I am ill-natured?' she asked, some humiliation in the question.

He glanced across at Lady Field, noticed the close lines of the lips, thin as those of a Leonardo portrait, the narrow

forehead under its shining mist of hair, the pointed delicate chin, the lustrous eyes. 'No, Esther,' he answered, 'I think what you say must be true.'

'Will you come down to the smoking-room, Steve?' said his brother when the guests had departed, 'and we will go on with what we were talking about, though I can't believe yet, you mean it.'

'But I do!' said Stephen.

'Right! then come along. Of course it can't all be settled in a minute, and anyhow, the house and you must both take time to consider it; but talking it well over now will make that all the easier.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

We are ne'er like angels till our passions die.

DECKER.

THEY did talk it well over; with such results that when Stephen left the house, an hour later—despite his brother's reiterated advice to him, to be sure of his own mind before he decided, and his warning that the bank would also have to consider the matter—the young man felt his fate was fixed, and a strange numbness of regret ached within him.

Perhaps it was better so, if only because of this idea, which he could scarcely explain, yet which possessed him,

that he must throw all his past life behind him.

Only a few weeks ago he had laughed at Essie for thinking that money-making would prove a remedy for the unrest of his being, and yet to-night he had himself sought its help !

Not, however, as a cure for his ill ; but because of the sheer need he felt of leaving England, while knowing well that wandering about in his old *dilettante* fashion, at his own pleasure, with no fixed object, would be intolerable. He had known at last the one woman who might be to him the fulfilment of all his old yearnings, his vague desires. She being forbidden to him, how could he tread the old paths which, having once seemed to lead him to her, would now guide him further and

further away?—whither he knew not. No, a thousand times no; it was all of no avail, this life which would have been so lovely, with her for its soul.

‘Art for Art’s sake!’ It might have been so once, could never be now. Neither his cunning nor his love of art was strong enough to make it suffice unto him. The knowledge had grown slowly on him during these months, in which he had yet painted better than ever before.

Yet it was hard to give it all up; albeit he knew the old ambition was dead, its memory was still dear. He reached home, let himself in, and taking a lamp unlocked the studio door.

All the past years rose up in him as, lamp in hand, he stood before one picture after another. Judged by the work of

other painters, themselves far from great, these paintings, the best he could achieve, were poor, crude, wretched. He could no longer see the qualities which gave his work real charm and value.

He might have done better—yes, if he had toiled as had those other men, with hand and heart, soul and brain, from early youth—but now a voice within him cried, ‘Too late.’ He had not been faithful in few things, how could he hope to be made ruler over many things? He had wasted his youth, idly, pleasantly wasted it; if painting might once have been his work, it could never be so now.

He knew his task to-night, the hardest Life had ever set him; yet, which he could not shirk as he had shirked many of her commands that had seemed to deal with

him alone. It must be done, the quicker the better, but why must the stroke fall on Honor? Why must the heaviest burden, the sorest pain, be hers, if she obeyed him? Him, who felt each throb of her pain worse than his own.

In a dull, heavy manner, he sat down to the writing-table, and took up a pen. He had longed so often to write to her, and now this desire was granted him—as desires often are granted, in this world, a bitter expiation of their indulgence.

But no words blotted the page before him: though he sat there long, staring at the white blank sheet of paper, which should be the messenger of pain and doubt and struggle to Honor. Honor! Honor! her name rang through him; so sweet, so

sweet, so sweet ! and then, ‘I can’t !’ burst from him, and he broke down.

In the silence and the night, with only the small lamp shining through the gloom, the passion and frustrated hope of his parting with Honor ; the long unrest of the dreary autumn months ; the shock of Archdale’s story ; the long hard fight waged with himself, through these wintry hours ; temptation, struggle, resolve—all these found vent in the storm which shook through him, unrestrained and unresisted, at last.

But when it had passed, his way lay clear before him, even while he shrank back, doubting his own power to tread it.

No written word of his would move her ; he must go to her and plead with her himself—he, the man who loved her, must

yet urge her husband's right.—Was he strong enough for this?

Why not? he was a man, but was manhood to be only the sign of brute weakness, as of brute strength, rather than of self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control? She had appealed to him as better, wiser, and stronger than herself; was he to prove ignoble, selfish, untrue alike to himself, his friend, and to her, on that one plea of his manhood, which should itself degrade that manhood and stamp it as base?

CHAPTER XXX.

Alas! how oft in dreams I see
Those eyes that were my food,
Which sometime so delighted me,
That yet they do me good!

EARL OF SURREY.

‘Do you know where Miss Honor is, ma’am? I’ve been searching for her all over the place.’

Mrs. Ross, placidly toasting her feet by the fire, and enjoying the last volume of Max Müller, looked up from her book, at Ruth’s inquiry. The brief December day was drawing to a close, and the level red line of the sunset could be seen from the window of the room; that little parlour, where stood the old spinet, already this

afternoon only a dusky shape, in the gathering darkness.

‘I think she went out, along the cliff; do you want her, Ruth?’

‘It’s only I’ve mixed the Christmas-pudding, ma’am, and she ought to stir it for luck. Yes, there she is,’ said Ruth, going to the window, from whence she could descry a tall, slender form, on the sere moorland, and thrown out by the darkening sky. ‘I’ll go and call her in.’

Mrs. Ross sighed as the door closed behind Ruth. She had been strangely thoughtless and unwary through those June and July days; but autumn and winter had brought to her, only too clearly, the sense of her folly.

She knew the meaning of Honor’s dragging step, and of the aching sadness and

passion of her gaze; knew how Honor's flush of girlish beauty and gladness, which had so rejoiced her in the summer, when she did not reck of its cause, had died away into a restless, despairing unhappiness. Oh, would that fate had never that night driven Stephen Nugent to their door!

Meanwhile Ruth, bare-headed and bare-armed, with rolled-up sleeves and wooden spoon in hand, had made her way through the keen east wind to where Honor stood, motionless, her gaze fixed on that tossing, leaden waste of waves.

‘Miss Honor, do for mercy’s sake come in, and leave off staring at the sea, as though you’d bring about a wreck. You’ll draw a ship here, on these rocks, with your eyes, if you don’t take care.’

Honor turned round, a ghost of her old smile on her face at the woman's fancy.

‘There are wrecks enough, Ruth, without our willing them.’

‘God knows it ; so let Him take care of them, and do you come in, Miss Honor. There’s the pudding needs stirring and wishing over, or it won’t bring luck to any of us.’

‘Will it with wishes?’ asked Honor, listlessly following Ruth to the house, and entering, by the back door, into the large, low kitchen, where the fire sparkled and glowed, the candles stood ready lit on the dresser, and on the table was the large, cream-hued pan, containing the pudding mixture. On the fire, a huge saucepan of boiling water was already bubbling a low song of rapture, as though waiting to

embrace its bride, the pudding, when she was duly enveloped in her bridal veil, the fair white cloth, lying ready on the table.

Christmas, if its observance had been left to Mrs. Ross and Honor, might have been slighted at Trebarva, but Ruth's Cornish conservatism found expression in her Yuletide preparations. To-day had seen the arrival of the Polmouth carrier with Ruth's commissions, entrusted to him some days before; and so it came to pass that the kitchen wore a really festive aspect, with its goodly wreathing of greenery. Laurel, holly, and arbutus bright with its rosy fruit decked dresser and mantelshelf; while Joshua, on his accustomed settle by the fire, was devoting himself to the garlanding with evergreens, of wooden hoops, fixed crossways in couples, one inside the

other, and hung with apples and oranges. These hoops, which are a common West country fashion of Christmas decoration, were being wreathed on such a scale of splendour, and with such lavish bravery of roughly-made roses of white and red tissue-paper, that Honor felt they imperatively demanded her tribute of admiration.

‘Yes, I think they are fine *surely*!’ said Joshua, with a meditative and modest appreciation of his work, balancing the half-wreathed hoops in one hand and the reel of wire wherewith he was binding them, in the other, ‘and so does Annie.’

Annie Crocker, a small black-eyed maiden, the daughter of a neighbouring fisherman, retained for the day by Ruth, to minister unto her in such matters as

stoning raisins and chopping suet, was looking on with an inward amazement and delight, heightened by the remembrance of the heavy-cake, rich with plums and spice, now baking in the oven, which would presently glorify the kitchen tea-table.

These were not the only signs of Christmas festivities, or of Ruth's exertions in their cause. On the side table stood a large saffron cake, upturned on a sieve that the steam might escape; and close to it was a pilchard pie of equal worth and size, together with a piled-up dish of soda buns, another of potato pasties, and a splendid junket. It was Ruth's one yearly chance of entertainment, and she availed herself well of it, and of Mrs. Ross's sanction thereof.

‘Whom are you having to dinner

to-morrow, Ruth?' asked Honor, having duly recognised Joshua's handiwork.

'The Harrisons, Miss Honor—he's the new coastguard man at Lynion, and turns out to be an old mate of Joshua's, when he was on the "Lion." They have five children, and the mistress said they could all come; then there's my cousin, Tom Thomas, from Jericho'—a farm near Polmouth, so named, it was supposed, in Puritan times—'Mrs. Ross says he may sleep here, else he could ne'er drive the twenty miles back; and Annie Crocker, if she minds herself,'—with a severe glance of warning at the unfortunate Annie, one of the meekest and handiest of children, and with a wholesome awe of Mrs. Ruth.

'Now, Miss Honor, dear,' said the presiding priestess of the mysteries, with an

unusual tenderness, seeing how pale the girl's face showed in the bright firelight, 'stir and wish,' tendering, as she spoke, the large wooden spoon.

Honor laughed sadly : she knew only one wish ; that which had been wringing her heart so long, the craving to see Nugent once again. Stirring the plum pudding would scarce bring that to pass. 'What shall I wish, Ruth?' she asked. 'A new gown for you?'

'You mustn't tell, miss, or it won't come about,' eagerly interrupted Annie, her sense of the awfulness and importance of the rite overpowering even her fear of Ruth and her shyness of Honor.

'Won't it?' said Honor, looking kindly at the child. Christmas was still a joy to this little girl ; a joy to Ruth and Joshua,

after all their years of hard toilsome life ; while to her—— Ah, if he were but here !’

The longing, always consciously or unconsciously present in her mind, had involuntarily taken form, even as she listlessly stirred the contents of the pan.

‘ Have you wished ? ’ asked Annie dubiously, but respectfully. Honor dropped the spoon and stood, fingering a spray of arbutus with its waxen flowers and berries, which were as a mockery of summer fruits.

She started. ‘ Yes, Annie,’ she answered, ‘ though I did not know it till I had done so.’ She left the kitchen and went upstairs to where Mrs. Ross was quiet in the twilight.

Christmas Day broke clear, but not very cold, although a slight powdering of

snow veiled the brown waste land. From her room, Honor when she woke could hear Ruth's and Annie's voices singing in perfect accord :

I spied three ships come sailing by,
Come sailing by, come sailing by—

the jubilation of the carol being succeeded by the graver air and mood of ' Good King Wenceslaus.'

It was all apart from her : their Christmas greeting, as she came downstairs, fell on her heart as coldly as the snow on the dry heather outside ; she hated herself for it, yet could not help it ; she felt numb and dead.

Mrs. Ross and she exchanged no special salutation, but Mary's ' good morning ' was perhaps tenderer than usual.

' You won't go to church, through the

snow, I suppose?’ said Honor, after breakfast. ‘I am sure it is too long a tramp for you to Lymington.’

‘Perhaps so ; is it snowing now?’

‘No, but the sky is very heavy, and it may come down at any moment. I am going for a wander among the rocks. It is so seldom one sees them white, I shall enjoy it.’

‘Don’t lose your way, whatever you do.’

‘Oh, no! it isn’t thick enough for that. Take care of yourself till I come in.’

The wind had fallen, the air was still and chill, as Honor crossed the moor, Dan springing along in front of her. There was a certain exhilaration in the day, and Honor’s step was lighter, the ache of her

heart less sore, till she came to the glen Stephen had named her garden.

The little spring which had laughed to them in the summer, through its garlands of honeysuckle and bryony, now fell with a desolate sound, down to the stones of the beach, between the dead branches and shrivelled bramble-leaves, still stretched across its path.

It all came back to her then, her joy and her sorrow, blent with the quick living shame which had grown part of both, with the knowledge that the marriage-bond, which had only been the shackle of a slavery she could not bear and must break, at what cost it mattered not, might have been to her, as to other women, the sacrament of life—and love.

The remembrance of the mockery of

that sacrament, the shame of it, were all the more terrible to this woman, who had learned what love was, what marriage ought to be—too late.

She turned away from her withered garden—that garden which would never more be itself to her, however sweetly foxglove and honeysuckle might blossom again, in the summer that would surely come—and took the path towards Lynion, when she saw a figure in the distance, which made her steps to halt, so thickly did her heart beat. She was afraid to trust her sight ; there was a surging in her ears, her head was dizzy, her eyes swam ; but Dan, surer of his instincts, sprung forward to welcome Stephen back with riotous delight.

They stood face to face, he and she,

each seeing their own pain, endured through these long months, reflected in the other's eyes.

Honor spoke first, her voice half whisper, half sob :

‘I knew you would come ; I wanted you so much !’

CHAPTER XXXI.

If the sense is hard
To alien ears, I did not speak to these ;
No, not to thee, but to thyself in me.
Hard is my doom and thine : thou know'st it all.

Love and Duty.

HE had braced himself for everything—but this. Strangely enough, he had never thought how the severance and sorrow might work on her, so that the surrounding solitude which she had once loved should grow hateful to her, the sound of the sea seem but the echo of her own pain, waking her in the morning, with hateful reiteration, sobbing even through her dreams. He had never imagined that she, who so bravely sent him from her,

would thus welcome him, the need of her life, too dear to be resisted, be the end what it would.

He knew she was ignorant of what the meaning of her words might prove, if he willed it so ; yet, none the less, they appealed to him, and it was some time before he could gather strength to answer her, and crush down all the old self which rose within him, crying desperately, passionately, selfishly : ‘I love her—let us be !’

How pale and thin she was ! It was a sobering shock, as he marked the change the months had wrought in her. Sweeter than ever ! yes ; but the delicate line of the cheek was more distinct, the lips bloomed more deeply from the paleness in which their flower was set, and the

great eyes shone under the hollowed brows, mournful even now, despite their momentary gladness. So it was, he saw her again.

‘I have come—’ he began, then stopped. How could he tell her?

Her quick ear caught the harsh, strained ring of his voice. ‘What is it?’ she asked, looking at him, a new terror in her face. ‘Why are you here? What have you come to say?’ The dread of an unknown evil was upon her.

The presentiment of her question made his task easier, yet thrice he strove for words and they would not come.

They were standing by the crags of the cliff’s crest; the sea-wind had swept away the lightly-lying snow from the huge rocks, leaving their weather-stains and tawny

lichen-patches clear, as in summer ; Honor's hand steadied her, as she stood looking at Nugent, with a desperate terror of what his words might mean, one slender arm propping her against the masses of the storm-beaten grey rock. Even so, the hand trembled, but her voice was firm, though low, as she asked—

‘What is it? Why are you afraid to tell me? I can bear it.’

‘Forgive me first!’ he faltered.

Only her look answered him, but it made him quiver with the rarest touch of pain; it meant that nothing he could do or say could need her pardon. Life or death at his hands—let either come.

He never knew how he told her what he had learned of her story, through his meeting with her husband, saying nothing

of Archdale's idea of her reason for leaving him, but, as he had schooled himself to do, dwelling rather on Rex's loyalty and faith in her, his obstinate pride, his wish—— Here for a moment Nugent could say no more.

He could not see Honor's face ; in her agony of shame she had turned away, and was clinging, half standing, half crouching, to the rock for support. For all his tenderness, Stephen's words fell on her heart burning like drops of molten metal. He hear of her from Rex !—listen to her story from his lips ! In the madness and torture of the thought her head sank between her hands on the rock, while, as from afar, she still heard Stephen's voice.

No ! this must be a horrible delirium ; she could not hear aright. It could not be

he was urging her to go back to her husband.

As the truth forced itself upon her she roused herself at last, and looked up at him, a dumb wrath and reproach in her eyes.

‘You ! *you* !’ she gasped.

He felt all her meaning, and answered wildly, almost fiercely—

‘Yes—I—because I felt I must. Don’t you know what it is to me to say this, and how I fought against the feeling, that it is the only right thing to do? It is worse than death to me, for I am you.’

‘You cannot be,’ she answered in a smothered tone, ‘or you would know all this means.’

She paused, as gathering strength to overthrow all instinct of reserve ; then went

on, with the reckless truth that desperation will sometimes wring from a woman who has held herself to herself for years—

‘If I had never met you, I don’t know but perhaps some day I might have felt I had done wrong—it didn’t seem wrong then—and tried to make it right, if he wished it, as,’ she faltered, ‘you say he does; but now—oh, how can *you* tell me to do this?’

Ah! how could he? Was it not hard enough already, without her sobbing reproach, born of the anguish he felt, but dared not soothe? Tender words were traitors to his purpose and to her. He had never known how fair she was, or how dear, till that piteous question came from her quivering lips.

‘If you must hate me,’ he said, ‘hate

me ; it is better so ; but listen why I say this.'

His words touched her better, tenderer, stronger self, swift to answer any appeal to it.

'I could not hate you,' she answered faintly ; 'I know you say this because you believe it right. I know it is pain to you, perhaps the same pain as it is to me. It is only myself I hate, for it is all my fault you are unhappy.'

'No, Honor, never that.'

She went on as though she did not hear him.

'If you had not met me this could not have happened. All my fault,' she repeated, with a sudden wild sob. 'It can never be right again ; but leave me here, alone.'

And yet he pleaded to her, feeling all the while he must break out in a hollow, bitter laugh, at the barren futility of his arguments.

Arguments, forsooth, between him and her ! truisms, worthy of a lawyer's clerk, as to a contract being binding, even when signed in ignorance of its meaning, and calm statements as to a husband's rights ; prudent considerations as to what her life must be ; Archdale's merits, &c., &c.—all these he had duly determined to urge when he met her, lest in that hour it should not be given him what to speak.

He had learned his task, but it faltered on his tongue, as he could fancy the scorn in her eyes, that were turned away from him to watch the heaving waters and the flight of the gulls, that swooped unhasting,

unresting, above the waves. What were these poor platitudes here, in her presence, before that one truth of their two hearts, hers and his, aching, loving, divided for ever by these maxims wherewith he strove to preach them down? And yet he spoke, feeling that what he urged was best for her, though knowing such reasons as he gave, the morals of Mr. Worldly Wiseman, would avail nothing with Honor.

She looked up as he ceased, with a faint scornful smile, as in contempt for the love that could deal with her thus, or dream such pleas had power over her nature.

‘Anyone could have said this,’ she answered, her voice ringing clear and bitter and passionate, ‘as well as you. You leave it all to me; you try to persuade me it is for my good’—she dwelt on the last word

with an utter pain and scorn. ‘And if it were, what is good or harm to me? If you had even said, “Do it for my sake!”’

There was a silence, except for the cries of the sea-gulls, the dull, plunging thud of the waves on the rocks below; no gleam of sun lit the grey wintry sea, the grey wintry sky, and all around them spread the dry waste of heather, with its veil of snow. Nugent saw it all ere, schooling his voice to self-control, he spoke again.

‘If you will have it so—yes; for my sake as for your own. There can be only one other end to this—for we love each other. Save me from lowering the woman I love; for even in my eyes you would be lowered if that end came. And for me, I should be so vile you would learn to

hate me as I deserved. Honor, save us both.'

The words sounded brutal to him, even as he uttered them, yet, God help him and her, they were the truth. Then came a long pause, and if a girl's heart seemed to her to break therein—who could tell?

She did not look at him as once, before the word came from her—'Go!'

'Honor, not so, not so!'

She gazed at him strangely; then, like a ghost looking back on life, 'I will do it,' she said.

As though his doom was spoken, he moved sharply away; then turning again, his passion sweeping through him, he fell at her feet, pressing to his brow, his hands, his lips, his heart, the rough serge of her

gown, in an agony of farewell. His saint, his darling, transfigured, to his eyes, through her pain.

‘I will do it,’ she repeated : ‘but go, it is all said now.’

CHAPTER XXXII.

A long, long road of pain, my dear,
A long road full of pain.—CARLYLE.

HONOR never knew how long she sat there, in the chill December day. Only one fact pressed on her brain : Stephen had gone ; he and she had bidden farewell for ever. Before, when they had parted, for all the bitterness, there had not been this aching of a hopeless pain which must be endured ; a weight on her heart, numbing her youth and womanhood into an apathy, in which alone it seemed she could find rest.

Some shadow thereof had fallen on her last July, when he had left her, but then

the hot rain of tears had thawed the death-cold which seemed stealing on her heart. Now she sat mute, with wide, tearless eyes, fixed across the moor, to where the sky met the level line of the land, while her hand mechanically plucked the short, dry blades of a patch of turf, set among the rocks beside her.

Across the still air came the faint sound of the bell of Lynion church, ringing for Christmas Day. She drew in her breath with a sharp sound, between a sob and a cry. Dan, who all this time had been lying at her side, restless and uneasy, but not interfering, looked up wistfully, but she did not heed him, and so the hours slipped away.

At last she rose, dragging weary, listless feet along the path. Stephen and she

had trodden, in the glow of the summer sunset, that evening she had first realised how sweet, how near, how dear, his friendship had grown to her, and when the windows of the old house caught the fire of the west and seemed all ablaze within, with triumph and festivity. Something of a semblance in the memory, to the facts of her life, struck her now.

All through the day, she moved about as in a trance; or like a prisoner, who knows the morrow brings his death. Mrs. Ross noticed nothing amiss, but Ruth was troubled within herself.

She had always divined far more of the girl's history than either Honor or Mrs. Ross suspected. She remembered the shine of the wedding ring on Honor's ungloved hand, when she first stood in

the lamplight at the door of Trebarva, and she had only missed it two days later.

Mrs. Harrison, the coastguard's wife, had just astonished and rather troubled her by the information that a gentleman had ridden over from Polmouth the night before, and was at the Lynion Inn, a queer place to drag down to on Christmas Eve; but Mrs. Fall had told her it was the painter gentleman, who was down here in the summer, before Harrison was moved over here from Penzance, and who used to be so much at Trebarva. 'I suppose,' ended Mrs. Harrison, 'he'll be coming over here to-day, to eat his Christmas dinner with your ladies.'

So Ruth also supposed, but it disturbed her. She had not been blind to the change

these six months had wrought in Honor. She, as well as Mrs. Ross, knew how the girl's step had lost its spring, her voice and look their brightness ; nor was she at a loss to guess the cause thereof.

After some deliberation, while she basted the beef and mixed the batter of the Yorkshire pudding, she wiped her floury hands and was proceeding to the parlour, to inform her mistress of Mr. Nugent's return to Lynion, when she met Honor just entering by the front door. As the girl passed her, Ruth was startled and frightened by her look. What did its dull wretchedness mean ?

‘She has seen him,’ the woman thought. ‘Why hasn't he come back here with her ? It's not my business to tell the mistress now, but a plague take him for coming

here and troubling that poor child! My mind always misgave me, those traipsings about the moors and talking of all things on heaven and earth, would end in nought but a mort o' pain for her. It's always the same.'

Late in the afternoon when she entered the west parlour, she noted how Honor was sitting by the fire. She held a book in her hand, between her and the blaze, and its boards curled outwards, towards the heat; but, for over an hour, she had not turned a page.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am; will you and Miss Honor pay us a visit in the kitchen now?'

'Certainly, Ruth,' and Mrs. Ross laid down her book,—'unless you have a headache, Honor?'

She lifted her head and rose. 'No,' she answered, 'I am all right. Let us go.'

The kitchen was bright enough, when they entered it, with the shining of its green bravery, and with Annie Crocker and the infant Harrisons flushed from a wild orgy of oranges, nuts, and mulled elder wine, and scarcely believing their own bliss. Joshua, Harrison, and Tom Thomas were enjoying a game of three-handed cribbage, and three churchwardens, their soothing influence assisted by that of a more potent stimulant than the sweetened juice of the elderberry, in which also Mrs. Harrison, seated by the fire, was indulging herself, every now and then, with a meditative sip, while luxuriating in that rare delight to a hard-worked matron of her class, complete idleness, and sniffing up the

fragrance of her wassail between-whiles, with placid enjoyment. Mrs. Ross felt sorry that her and Honor's entrance disturbed the worthy woman's content, by the necessity of rising to curtsey and wish them a merry Christmas.

The sight of the long low room, its glow and gladness, the children's voices and shrieks of laughter, the elder men and women's content, brought a new pang to Honor. So had she seen Christmas kept three years here, so she felt she would never see it again. She had not known how truly Trebarva had grown home to her, till now, when she must leave it.

‘Won't you play, Miss Honor?’ said Annie, coming up to her rather daringly.

‘Yes, Annie; what is it? Oranges and Lemons? but I'm so strong, I could pull

you all over at once. We must make Ruth play too.'

'I'm too old for such fooleries,' objected Mrs. Thomas.

'So am I, Ruth,' and Honor laughed ; 'but we'll forget our age and have one merry Christmas more ; hold up your hands with mine ; now, children, you first, Annie, and Bill after you ; that's right ; now begin.'

The strange relief of finding one can act a part to hide one's pain, possessed her, and her clear though untrained contralto led the time-honoured chant and chronicled the utterances of the bells and the mystic warning of the candle, to light them to bed, ending in the awful sentence of the chopper to chop off the last man's head, gaily enough. What was it, that made

her wish so tensely that these children's pleasant memories of her last Christmas at Trebarva should hold some hint of her? There was no need to wear her heart on her sleeve, or make other people dreary, because—oh, because!—She must not think of it now. Presently, when she was alone in the quietness and darkness, it would be her hour.

In this very bitterness of love a new tenderness for others seemed to have awakened within her. She stayed and played with the children, and at last, when they were tired, and gladly gathering round her at her proposal of a story, she told them the one that had come back to her as a chief delight of her own childhood as first related to her by Mrs. Ross and afterwards studied by herself, in a certain

fat red volume—Andersen's 'Garden of Paradise.'

The youngest of the Harrison children, a pretty, red-haired, grey-eyed mite of two, tired out with much playing, and careless of stories, had climbed on to Honor's lap, despite faint maternal remonstrances from Mrs. Harrison, now gossiping with Ruth, over the fire; and so fell fast asleep in the girl's arms. Something in the trusting touch of the little hands, the nestling of the curly head against her breast, comforted Honor oddly, soothing the inward pain which abided even now, as she told the story of the prince who, restored to Paradise, on the strong wings of the North Wind, boasting in his strength and warned to resist temptation, yet yielded and fell before the first whisper of his desire: so

woke to find himself in the cavern of the winds, far from the garden and the fairy, who had wept, even in her dream, for him and his weakness.

The story touched her more than it did the children, but her voice grew so passionate and sad as she told the end, how Death promised yet to bear the weak, erring prince to Paradise if he endured to the end, that one of the children, who had been sitting, listening quiet, with intense eyes and parted lips, said disappointedly—

‘But it is such a sad story.’

She had forgotten that, when she had begun, but, in the telling, she had found the words ‘sadder than she thought they were,’ and answered, more to herself than her audience—

‘Yes; and the saddest of all was, that

Death even could never take him to that Paradise and the fairy he had lost. He would never see them again !’

‘Never?’ repeated Annie, as appealing against Honor’s statement. ‘Never is such a dreadful word—in chapel,’ with a vivid remembrance of many ‘awakening’ sermons.

‘But was the other Paradise better?’ questioned another auditor.

‘I don’t know, Lizzie, but the prince did not think so.’

‘How do you know that, Miss Honor?’ asked the inquiring Annie.

‘Because it would have been no punishment to him else; but that is enough of sad stories. Did you ever hear of the shoes that were danced to pieces?’

No, no one had; but the detailed

adventures of the poor soldier and the seven frisky princesses proved so enthralling, that Honor had to recall to her own memory another of Grimm's sugared inventions, and yet another, till these delights bowed before the stronger attraction of snapdragon, which, in the meanwhile, had been secretly prepared by Ruth in another room.

‘Miss Honor,’ said Annie, at the end of the evening, ‘I got my wish on the pudding. Did you?’

Honor started. ‘Yes,’ was all her answer.

It was true, her Christmas wish had been fulfilled; fulfilled so as to leave her but one desire more in life—to die with the dying year.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

‘There was but one right thing in the world to do,
And I must do it.’ KINGSLEY.

It was all over, the Christmas fire burnt out, the children gone, and Honor was alone in her room, now flooded by the serene, cold light of the winter moon. Outside, the radiance glorified sea and sky and the snow-strewn heath; and through the window, it fell full on the pale face, with its steadfastly set mouth, its eyes full of memories, tender and sweet and bitter—the memories which must be forgotten from to-night, or they would make her mad.

From the window, she could see the slope down the cliff, leading to her 'garden' and the coastguard path, down which she had so often watched Stephen go, on those soft June nights. There was the cave where her boat used to be kept. Her heart went back to their struggle together against the merciless, pitiless sea ; again came the terrible, momentary yearning. Would that the waves, at that moment, when love seemed no sin, had risen yet higher, where they stood on that rock, his arms about her—risen to their lips and swept them away together, him and her, for evermore !

'Thick as roses in rose harvest,' thronged back to her the recollections of that summer-time which she must now forget. Yes, as Annie had said, 'never'

was a dreadful word, in chapel or out of chapel.

There was only one comfort : it was Stephen who had bidden her do this ; his command obeyed for his sake. But what if this very obedience should make him think in the future, ‘She cared little for me after all’? She trusted his love, strangely and hardly as it had dealt with her, but would he ever know how she had loved him?

She thought of tales of women-martyrs for love, who conquered their agony at the sight of the torture of their dearest, or hung gladly on the cross by his side, or bore severance, till life should end, rather than tarnish the brightness of one dear name, in the eyes of others. Gertrude van Wart, S. Maura Heloïse.

Oh,' she sobbed, 'what was all they did to this!'

And if—and if—she should never be any better than she was now; if this, which Stephen and the world held as her duty, should only drag her down? She knew what Stephen said about Rex Archdale was true; he was kind-hearted and trusting, and forgiving her, would never reproach her with the past; but, though he was better than she, in many ways, she felt life with him might—and most likely would—be death to the larger and higher life she had grown to understand. She knelt down, and from her soul's pain, came with a child's simplicity, if with a woman's fervour, 'Oh God, help me and teach me, for I have no one else!'

She rose, and going to the landing,

listened to the clatter below, which told that Ruth, assisted by Annie, was still employed in clearing away the feast and putting the kitchen tidy. It would have been impossible to Ruth to have slept with the sense that she had left this duty unfulfilled; and, acting on her often expressed maxim, that every day makes its own work, she was vigorously setting things straight for the morrow, when Honor's voice called out to her from above.

Mrs. Thomas left the dish she had just washed to Annie to dry, not without a curt warning against clumsiness in general and dish-breaking as a particular instance thereof. She found Honor standing at the head of the staircase. 'Is aught the matter, Miss Honor?' she asked nervously.

Her mind had misgiven her all day, nor had Honor's unwonted endeavours to amuse the children reassured her in the least, any more than did her present appearance in her long white wrapper, with the richness of her hair loose around her pale, resolute face.

‘Nothing : I only want to know if you think I can get a carriage to-morrow from St. Osyth.’

‘Of course you can’t,’ said Ruth decisively. ‘It’s Boxing Day, and Dimsdale doesn’t mean to run his omnibus ; but where are you going, Miss Honor ?’ with apparent indifference.

‘To Polmouth—to London.’

London ! a terrible fear seized Ruth, of which she yet felt ashamed before Honor’s direct eyes.

‘Don’t!’ she exclaimed. ‘Don’t, my dear.’

‘Why?’

Ruth stammered horribly. ‘Mrs. Harrison told me Mr. Nugent came to Lynion last night—why hasn’t he come here to see the mistress?—Oh, Miss Honor, forgive me—but I’m afeart!’

A hot blush of anger swept over Honor’s face; she raised her head and looked full at the other woman, with an unspoken pride, which Ruth felt as a rebuke.

Yet her own soul smote her. What right had she to be angered by the suspicion? If Stephen had said ‘Come,’ would she not have gone?

Suddenly the truth flashed on her, bearing with it such bitterness of humili-

ation as should surely purge away her sin ; and her answer was grave and gentle.

‘I understand, but you need not be afraid. I must go, but I shall not meet or see Mr. Nugent.’

‘There’s Tom Thomas sleeping here,’ said Ruth hesitatingly ; ‘he drove over in his hooded cart, and if you didn’t mind that, Miss Honor, he’d take you to Polmouth with pleasure ; only he says he must leave early, and so, I suppose, you’d have to wait the mail train at Polmouth till the evening.’

‘Thank you ; will you ask him to take me?’ Honor turned away towards Mrs. Ross’s room, and Ruth, longing, yet fearing, to ask more questions, left her.

The girl paused with her hand on the latch of her friend’s door, then laid her

soft cheek gently against the panel, as it had been Mary Ross's hand.

‘No,’ she thought, ‘it will be time enough for her to know to-morrow—let her sleep to-night!’

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Gift ungotten, largess high,
Of a frustrate will ;
But to yield it lovingly
Is a something still.—*Phantastes*.

So it came to pass that, when Mrs. Ross descended on the morrow morning into the parlour, she was startled to find Honor in travelling trim, her small black felt hat, large fur-lined cloak and travelling bag lying on a chair, while she herself, with dark circles round her eyes, and pallid lips, was busy, as usual, making the tea.

‘Honor!’

She came to her friend very tenderly and kissed her, holding both Mrs. Ross’s hands fast in her own. ‘I thought it was

better not to tell you before, dear—I must leave you.’

‘Leave me!’

‘Yes. Oh, Mary, if you are not brave, I cannot be.’

Mrs. Ross was silent, struggling with herself; her instinct told her Honor’s purpose. She had always vaguely feared this hour, yet now that the blow had fallen she could not pray against it.

‘I can’t tell you anything,’ Honor went on, in a low hurried voice; ‘perhaps I may come back’—as a wild hope possessed her that, after all, Stephen might be wrong, and her husband refuse to receive her—‘but if I don’t—oh, Mary, forgive me for leaving you here alone. I seem to bring misery to every one—I suppose because I never learnt to rule myself.’

‘You were never taught. It was not your fault, poor child.’

‘I am punished for it!’ was all Honor replied.

‘May I not go with you?’ her friend pleaded gently.

Honor shook her head. ‘No, dear,’ she said; then with a jarring laugh, ‘“this dismal scene I needs must act alone.”’

The reality the quotation meant rushed upon her; she was going back to Rex Archdale to sue for his forgiveness. Her pride shrank from the idea, and she shuddered; yet what had she now to do with pride?

Her voice sounded, to Mrs. Ross, like an echo of Marie Antoinette’s ‘Nothing can hurt me now.’ Honor saw the pain of her friend’s face, and, by an effort, endea-

voured to reassure her. ‘Don’t be wretched, Mary,’ she said, striving to appear cheerful. ‘One thing I am sure of: we will not be parted for long, even if—if—I don’t come back.’

‘Ah, don’t make plans, my child!’—involuntarily Mrs. Ross’s lips quivered and her tears broke forth. As Honor knelt to soothe her, the elder woman’s arm clasped her, as though they could hold her back from the fate which drew her away from her refuge. Honor tried to speak, but all she could say was, ‘You have been so good to me, so good, all these years!’

In came Ruth, laden with the breakfast, and wearing the stern, set face and curt manner which, with her, denoted trouble.

‘It’s not half an hour, ma’am, before Tom Thomas ’ll have to start, and Miss

Honor will need to eat something before a twenty miles drive.'

Thus admonished, Mrs. Ross and Honor sat down to the table, but, despite Ruth's warning, the meal was a miserable farce. Honor drank a cup of tea, that her example might help Mrs. Ross to do the same, then came round to her and, sitting by her silently, took and held her hand. So they waited listening for the sound of wheels, which would tell them their parting had come.

At last Honor rose. 'I hear it,' she said : 'good-bye !'

Mrs. Ross nerved herself as dreading Honor might resent her action, then went to an old bureau and unlocked one of the many cunningly-planned drawers.

Without a word, she held out to

Honor something which shone in the pale sickly light of the winter sun, struggling through the snowy sky—Honor's wedding ring.

She took it silently and drew it on her finger, then turned to Mrs. Ross and clung to her once more, as though imploring pardon for leaving her.

It was over ; she was in the hooded cart, being driven away from Trebarva, by the side of Tom Thomas, a stout Cornishman, ruddy and of a cheerful countenance, but, fortunately for Honor, blest with a remarkable talent for silence—so that, for the last time, uninterrupted, the girl could gaze her fill on the scenes amidst which she had lived for the last three years, and which had grown so dear—how dear, she had not known till now. .

CHAPTER XXXV.

Duties are ours ; events are God's.—MATTHEW HENRY.

It was not till the Cornish train was nearing London, that the question faced Honor, where to find Rex. Her old habit of acting on impulse had guided her through the last few days, with its old forgetfulness of results ; then she remembered the words in Nugent's voice—‘at his old rooms in Jermyn Street.’

She recalled the number easily enough ; during those strange confused weeks of her short engagement to Archdale, she had often addressed letters there, thanking him for trinkets or flowers.

She was very tired; the long hours spent in the train had been almost as sleepless as those of the preceding night, and her pale face, with the purple rims round the heavy eyes, was very wan, almost haggard. It was not thus Rex Archdale remembered his wife, not thus Nugent had first seen her coming towards him in the May sunshine, fair as May herself.

And now this meeting with her husband, which she dreaded so much, was near! She would not think of it till she found herself face to face with him, lest her courage should fail. How strange London seemed, with its tall, seemingly roofless houses closing in the lowering sky, its myriad noises, after those three years

spent amidst the strength of the cliffs, the sound of the sea!

The cab drew up in Jermyn Street, and she alighted, but as she rang the bell, her heart's beat seemed to sicken and cease, with the suspense and fear.

‘Mr. Archdale?’ no; he was out of town, and—did she want to see him specially? asked the boy in buttons, with a curious stare, ‘because——’

‘Who’s that inquiring about poor Mr. Archdale, Jim?’ called out a voice from a room within, and forth issued the landlady, who looked at Honor, half doubting, half recognisant; then exclaimed, ‘Mrs. Archdale, ma’am?’

Honor was startled. ‘Yes—how do you know me?’

I saw you married, ma'am, that's how—but Mr. Archdale, poor gentleman'—she hesitated.

'What has happened?' asked Honor, the twice applied epithet striking her painfully.

'Will you come in here to my room?'

The landlady's tone was respectful, yet implied a certain doubt as to how far Rex Archdale's well or ill being concerned his wife. Honor had learned to realise the facts of life more clearly than of yore, and knew what the doubt meant. She entered the room, followed by the landlady, and, turning round, faced her fully.

'I have a right to know what has happened to my husband.' How strange the word sounded to her ears!

It hurt her pride to have to explain,

even so vaguely ; her manner was more than words, and Mrs. Symonds' brow cleared.

‘I beg your pardon, ma'am ; but I never rightly understood’—Honor winced secretly—‘and I'm sure your coming just now is a special providence, all the more that the poor gentleman seems to have none else belonging to him.’

‘What is it ? What do you mean ? Is Mr. Archdale ill ?’

The landlady looked frightened. ‘I'm afraid so, ma'am. Mr. Capper, his man, sent me this telegram this morning ; and when you came, I was just that upset, I didn't know what to do ; and when he had only just settled, poor dear, so comfortable into his rooms again.’

She had handed the slip of pink paper to Honor, who read : ‘From J. Capper, Red

Lion Inn, near Leamington, to Mrs. Symonds, 300 Jermyn Street.

‘Mr. Archdale thrown yesterday, badly hurt, horse rolled on him. Sir J. Gibson telegraphed to : will write.’

‘He’s always very friendly-like, is Mr. Capper,’ murmured Mrs. Symonds somewhat complacently, as Honor stared at the telegram, then made as to move towards the door, muttering, ‘I must go to him at once.’

But as she made a step forward, she reeled ; her head swam, and she would have fallen and fainted if Mrs. Symonds had not caught her.

The landlady did not know whence her guest had come, but her quick eye caught the unrested, weary look, the dulness of the rich hair, the languor and pallor of

the face, as the lids closed over the tired eyes, and her lingering doubt and suspicion melted away in real woman kindliness and concern.

‘You don’t go till you’re rested and refreshed, ma’am, and have had some tea. Now that’s right, be a dear, ma’am, and sensible, or you’ll be no use when you get to poor Mr. Archdale and find him getting better, as you will,’ said Mrs. Symonds, with an airy confidence which would have been more reassuring had it been built on any reasonable basis. ‘Why, if you don’t take care, he’ll have to be nursing you. There, lie down ; that’s right.’

Honor was too utterly worn out to resist, as Mrs. Symonds laid her on the prickly horsehair sofa of this, her own peculiar sanctum, unloosened her cloak,

removed her hat, and then bustled off to have tea prepared. Something in the girl's brave yet nervous gaze attracted the hard-working, energetic woman. 'And I fancied she must have turned out a bad lot,' she muttered. 'Who'd have thought she'd have felt it so? I wonder how it all came about?'

She took as much care of her visitor as she would have done of a sick child; and the rest and refreshment, with plentiful ablutions of cold water, restored Honor somewhat to her usual self, ere she drove off again to the Paddington Station she had so recently quitted, to catch an afternoon train for Leamington.

She had taken her ticket, and was moving off in order to let the gentleman behind her procure his, when she caught

sight of his face. For an instant she was puzzled, then recognised Sir John Gibson, the great surgeon, a personal friend of her father's, whom Agnes had cultivated, and who had been a guest at Honor's wedding.

He recognised her at once with his quick glance. 'Miss Denne—I beg your pardon—Mrs. Archdale. Good heavens!'—as part of the truth broke upon him—'It's not your husband to whom I am going down now?'

'Yes. Oh, Sir John! is he—will he—die?'

The surgeon turned round, saw the pale countenance, with its look of miserable, anxious remorse; he took her hands as to calm her, and answered—

'Die? no, my dear, I hope not; but

the telegram I had tells me very little ; you must keep a good heart.'

' But if—if he is very ill, may I see him ? '

The bell rang, and Sir John hurried Honor on to the platform and into an empty carriage, and followed her himself.

He began to remember something he had heard of Honor's marriage not turning out happily ; but poor Rex had been right in boasting that he had kept his wife's name from ever being breathed on, and Sir John's voice was very gentle as he answered her :

' It all depends. May I take a liberty as an old man and your father's friend ? '

A faint movement of her head gave assent.

' Your husband doesn't expect you ?

There has been some misunderstanding between you ?’

‘Yes. It was all my fault.’

‘Never mind that. Whosoever fault it was, he mustn’t be excited ; and were he conscious, it would most decidedly agitate him to see you, whom he doesn’t expect—whether pleasantly or the reverse. If he is unconscious, it is a different matter.’

‘Oh, he must forgive me !’ was Honor’s inward cry. Rex well and angered against her, perhaps bitter, even insulting, was the husband she was prepared to meet, and a terror to her ; but Rex ill, dependent on strangers, awoke only pity. If he should die !—unreasonably, madly, his wife felt his death would in some way be her work. A heavy sigh escaped her, and Sir John laid his hand on hers.

‘Don’t be so downcast, my child. Please God, we’ll pull him through, and you can make it up comfortably.’

He never forgot his companion’s look, though he could not comprehend it. Had Nugent been there, he would have understood how the vista of the ‘long, long road of pain’ she must tread, filled Honor’s inward vision. Sir John tried to banish her expression by ignoring it.

‘Papers!’ he exclaimed. ‘Of course; I haven’t read the *Times* yet, and you will like the *World* and *Punch*—seen his Almanack? No? Here they all are; then.’

He piled the seat next to her with papers; then, as the train moved off, opened his *Times*, and was soon engrossed therein, fancying rightly that she would

rather be left quiet. It was a long time before he looked up from behind its wide sheet ; when he did, the day was drawing in, as the train rushed across the snow-clad country with glimpses of the sluggish river, of the long, dim shadows of trees and hedges cast on the lonely whiteness, and the rifted orange streaks of a sullen sunset smouldering in the west.

Honor had fallen asleep ; her two wakeful nights had their revenge, and now slumber had come ; it was deep, albeit she now and then moved with a little shiver as if cold.

Sir John unfastened the neatly strapped-up rug his footman had placed in the carriage, and threw it over her ; then returned to his paper, while Honor slept on.

And in her sleep she dreamed; dreamed, as Nugent had done, of Cornwall, and, as she had guided his thought, so her dream was of him.

Not of his presence though. She was alone, straying as he had strayed, the night that led him to Trebarva, alone and lost on that dark waste of moor under a moonless heaven. There was no storm, only one of those clinging, ghostly mists veiling both moor and sky, and through it she heard Stephen's voice calling, Honor! Honor! Honor!

Yet, though she followed, she could never reach him where that cry came from through the shrouding dimness. Again the voice sounded—far-off, faint, imploring: ‘Honor! Honor!’ Then her foot

felt nothing, she had slipped over the cliff's edge ; was falling, falling, while from above, she still heard his voice yearning for her through the mist.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

To one deep chamber, shut from sound and due
To languid limbs and sickness.—*The Princess.*

HONOR woke with a jar and a crash ; the lights of the station at which they had stopped dazing her sleep-bewildered eyes, and the cry of ‘L’mington, L’mington,’ sounding in her ears. For a moment she had forgotten the present ; but it all came back as Sir John Gibson helped her out and collected his and her belongings. A young fellow, who had been awaiting the train, came up to them, as at first certain of the great surgeon’s identity, but rather puzzled on finding him accompanied by a

young lady. ‘Sir John Gibson?’ said the young man hesitatingly—he had a frank, pleasant face and manner—‘my name’s Hunsdon.’

‘It was you who telegraphed to me, then?’

‘Yes; I was with poor Archdale when the brute fell with him. I never saw a man come such a beastly cropper, and when they took him up——’ young Hunsdon shuddered slightly.

His voice and look made Honor feel cold. They told the whole ghastliness of the hideous, crushing fall of man and horse. Sir John saw her blench, and turned to her, saying to Hunsdon, ‘Don’t frighten Mrs. Archdale, we all know that a fall isn’t a pretty thing to see.’

The lad’s deep flush could be seen even

under the gaslight as he lifted his hat. ‘I beg your pardon,’ he stammered. ‘I didn’t know’— ‘Archdale was married,’ he was nearly saying, but changed it to— ‘where you were staying, Mrs. Archdale, or I should have wired. The carriage is outside; will you and Sir John get in?’

A minute or two more, and they were all three seated in the close, comfortable carriage that was waiting outside, rather to Sir John’s amazement; but the young man explained as they drove swiftly along the frosty road out of the town.

‘You see,’ he said, ‘my people made no end of a row that we didn’t bring Archdale back home; but he was so shat—— so much hurt, that we thought the nearer the better, and the “Red Lion”

was close at hand. It's a nice, comfortable old house, and we've got the two men who were staying there to turn out, for fear they should make a noise. It isn't far from our place either, and I've been able to make myself head nurse and look after things. His man Capper is a good fellow enough, but has no head. My mother got a first-rate nurse at once, and Dr. Burnet has been there three times to-day. He is waiting there for you now, Sir John. I got your telegram to say you would come by this train ; so he stayed there.'

'Is he conscious?' asked Sir John.

'Who? Archdale?'—the lad glanced nervously at Honor, then reflected that Sir John, as he asked a question, probably intended it to be answered. 'No ; you couldn't expect it, you know,' he added

extenuatingly: 'Dr. Burnet says it's concussion of the brain, and all the rest of it.'

Honor said nothing; she sat with her hands clasped on her lap. Young Hunsdon, facing her, thought it must be all right, since she had come down here with Sir John, but what a queer start it was! The beautiful, weary face, so girlish still, for all its pallor and fatigue, impressed him strongly; and, as he gave Sir John a brief account of how Rex had come by his accident, he looked nervously, from time to time, at Mrs. Archdale, as fearing to alarm her.

The carriage stopped at the door of the 'Red Lion,' an old-fashioned country inn, the warm light from its windows falling redly on the snow outside. When Sir

John had gone upstairs to his patient, with Dr. Burnet, Honor and Val Hunsdon stood together in the one private sitting-room of the inn.

‘I suppose you would rather be here with Rex, Mrs. Archdale,’ the young man said: ‘but if you would come up to us and stay there, I know my mother would be so glad.’

He felt a boy’s chivalry and longing to help this girl, so beautiful and lonely in her trouble.

‘Thank you, but I couldn’t—I must be here.’

‘I feel as though it were all my fault,’ said Hunsdon, with that impelled need of confession which urges many people to avow their involuntary or unrecognised share in a catastrophe. ‘You know when

we asked him to come down here, I told him we could mount him, and my father had settled for him to have Prince Edward, when I happened, by ill-luck, that first night, to mention Diana, a vicious brute, though a beauty to look at, whom we none of us could ride—and nothing would satisfy Archdale but he must try her. It was no use to say anything,’ Hunsdon went on; ‘and when I saw them go down, the mare on the top of him, over that bank——!’ he turned away as he spoke, a choke in his voice. ‘There’s one comfort,’ he added vindictively: ‘the brute was so damaged, she had to be shot herself.’

‘Poor thing!’ was Honor’s dreary comment.

‘She did her best to kill every one who mounted her, that’s all I know,’ said

Hunsdon, as rather resenting Honor's pity. 'I beg your pardon, Mrs. Archdale, I oughtn't to go on talking about it to you. Won't you come nearer the fire? You must be so cold.'

He pushed up a deep-seated, stiff, old-fashioned arm-chair, as he spoke, towards the fire, and Honor mechanically accepted his invitation, holding out her hands to the blaze, as striving, through them, to feel warm and sentient again: but it was her brain and heart seemed frozen; the fire-warmth could not pierce or melt their cold.

So they waited, till the two doctors came downstairs together, and Sir John spoke to Honor.

'Dr. Burnet will let you see him, my dear, if you wish it; but he won't know

you, and you must not try to make him do so. Be a brave girl, whatever comes to pass ; he will need all your nursing.'

She rose silently and followed Dr. Burnet up to her husband's room.

Was that Rex—that strange, white face against the pillow, with the dreadful, wide eyes, seeing nothing, understanding nothing? The face was unscarred ; there was no mark, but one deep purple bruise on the forehead ; all the evil was worked on the shattered form, hidden by the sheets. So it was she once more met her husband, face to face.

At a sign from the doctor, she drew nearer the bed and stood by its side, her gaze fixed on that mute, immovable countenance. A new well-spring of pity, suddenly warm and tender, gushed up

within her; melting the ice of her own frozen misery into human pain and anguish, at the sight of the young man she remembered glad and proud in his strength.

She forgot herself; the prayer for his life arose within her, unbidden and unresisted. It was hard to identify the wan, motionless figure before her with the man to whom her feeling had been that of an unwilling slave. It was easy, how easy, to yield him such tenderness and service as he needed now!

Meanwhile, downstairs—

‘Are you going up to London to-night, Sir John?’ asked Val Hunsdon, as the surgeon stood by the fire, with knitted brows. ‘If so, you’ll let me take you to the station, or will you come up and have

some dinner with us? There's a room ready, if you can sleep there.'

'Thanks, no; I must catch the 7.15. I can't do anything here; Dr. Burnet understands the case thoroughly. But I'm afraid,' he added, drawing on his gloves, 'we are, none of us, much use.'

'Do you think—he will die?'

'While there's life, there's hope—hardly a hope worth having, though, for a man like him; such a fine young fellow, too!'

'What do you mean, Sir John?'

'In any case, he will never be able to walk again. Don't let that poor girl, his wife, know—I don't think, though, there's much chance of it, he is hardly likely to last the night—but if he live, her life will have to be devoted to a hopeless invalid and cripple.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

But what to me, my love, but what to me?

Love's Labour Lost.

‘STEPHEN, is this true?’

It was a bright clear afternoon in January. Mrs. Strahan sprang up to meet her brother, as he entered her drawing-room, a decided shadow of anxiety on her clear brow.

‘What, Essie?’

‘Oh, you know what I mean! Isabel has just been here.’

‘And she told you of my plans. I am sorry, Essie. I wanted to tell you myself, only I waited till it was all settled—not to worry you.’

He was standing on the hearth-rug, his sister by him, and, as he spoke, he took her hand and held it closely. He knew how she would feel this abrupt discovery that he was about to leave England, though, with a man's horror of scenes, he had withheld the news from her as long as possible.

He felt now he had wronged her in so doing, that he might have trusted her courage, and that her long, faithful, tender affection had deserved more confidence from him.

‘But why are you going?’ she asked, a suspicious quiver in her voice.

‘You ought to be able to tell me,’ he retorted, trying to speak lightly, ‘as you were the first to put the idea in my head.’

‘But I never thought you would do it, and I wish to Heaven I had held my tongue! It is wretched, and, as you said, money-grubbing is contemptible.’

‘I don’t think I ever said that,’ returned Nugent; ‘anyhow, I wonder how you would like it if Geoff acted on that genteel principle?’

‘Oh, don’t laugh, I can’t bear it!’

‘I won’t, dear;’ and he held the little hand yet closer. ‘If I could see anything else to suit me I would take it; but I don’t.’

One of those sudden intuitions which come to most women flashed on Esther now. She remembered how changed she had found her brother on her return from abroad, and how her instinct understood the cause. A soft pity for Stephen’s un-

known trouble brought the tears to her eyes.

‘But your painting?’ she asked.

He sighed—a regretful sigh. ‘It is no good,’ he answered; ‘I stood self-convicted the other day when I all at once realised how bad it was. If I haven’t cared for it enough to work harder than I have done these last ten years, it is not my work; besides, it would keep me here.’

‘And you want to leave England.’

There was no questioning in her voice, only a sad assurance. Her brother turned to her with a quick reliance on her comprehension and sympathy, although he told her nothing of how this last year had wrought with his life.

‘Yes, I must go. If only I hadn’t to leave you, little woman, and Geoff!’

‘I wish I could help you.’

‘You have helped me, Essie ; all my life.’

They were silent for a while, but their musings were interrupted by a ring at the front door, and the subsequent appearance of a young man, an acquaintance both of the Strahans and of Nugent.

‘I thought you were down in Warwickshire, Coke,’ said Nugent after their greeting.

‘I only came up yesterday.—No, thank you, Mrs. Strahan, I never take tea now. Wasn’t it horrible, by the way, that smash of poor Archdale’s?’

‘Archdale’s? what do you mean?’

‘Didn’t you see it?’ said Essie. ‘It was in the papers a fortnight ago.—How is he, Mr. Coke?’

‘I saw nothing.’ Nugent spoke so roughly that both his sister and friend stared. ‘How did it happen—when?’

‘Nearly three weeks ago, out hunting. They didn’t think he could pull through at first, now they say he may; but he’ll never be good for anything except a wheelchair.’

‘Oh,’ said Esther, with a little sob, ‘how dreadful!’

‘It cut up every one there awfully. Hunsdon, who saw him go down, and helped to get him from under the horse, can’t speak of it now.’

‘And is no one with him?’ asked Mrs. Strahan.

‘Oh yes, his wife.’

Nugent said nothing: this was the

answer to his passionate unspoken question, his aching constant wonder as to how she fared. This was to be his last thought of her, which he must bear with him beyond the sea.

He never fathomed the depths of his mind that first instant when he heard of Archdale's state; could never say if for one moment a base and guilty hope had reared its head within him. 'Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?' that another's death should seem his gain? If such a thought was there, lurking unknown to himself, in another instant his pity and old friendship crushed it dead, never to rise again.

'Ah, God help her!' the prayer which had so often risen to his lips, was his heart's

cry now, sobbing in a sad litany whenever he thought of Honor, who was with her husband.

A month later and he was standing on the deck of the steamer in the redness of the sunset dying afar beyond Mount's Bay, and looking out towards the Cornish coast he had known with her.

He fancied he could discern the point where he and she had struggled against the waves—yes, that was Lynion ; even in the gathering darkness of the brief February day he could tell the headland.

And suddenly a turn in the line of the coast showed him Trebarva, its vacant windows flashing back the sunset as of old, and the jutting-out crags on whose brows Honor and he had last met. That rift in

the cliff must be her garden—waste and lonely for evermore.

He turned and left the deck ; this was his last sight of England ; a dream and memory of Honor to hold through the years.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Raise thy disconsolate brows—
And front with level eyelids the to-come
And all the dark of the world.—*Drama of Exile.*

MEANWHILE Honor watched by her husband's sick bed; unwearied and gentle, and learning many new letters in that strange alphabet of life some of us have hardly conned, far less learned to spell with, before death comes.

In those lonely night watches, those long, long days sitting beside that unconscious form on the bed, it slowly came to her that loyalty, to be true, must be alive, not dead; quickening spirit and thought. While each thought, each wish, each

action still owned Stephen as its master, she was wronging the man who lay there before her ; and if she had wronged him in the past, what reparation could she make now ? Each thought of Nugent must be resisted as it arose.

Then would come back the old agonising temptation ; the longing for one day of free, glad, innocent life and love, the thought that made her hands close over brow and eyes in a misery of shame. For shame had come to her now, a new and bitter word, hard to hear or to echo. She had loved Nugent, she loved him still, and it was wrong—wrong, even if they were severed for ever ; wrong in the face of that vow of hers, once so little regarded, so recklessly broken, but pledged to the man beside her, before God and man.

Yet gradually there awoke within her a tenderness for Rex Archdale ; a tenderness born of the sense of her failing in duty towards him, her longing to atone, her sense of powerlessness for good before the piteousness of that strong young life laid low.

At last there came a day when the glimmer of consciousness returned to Rex's eyes, when his lips moved feebly and faintly ; and at a sign from the doctor Honor rose and left the room.

But the sick man's brain, though still vague and wandering, retained the vision of her presence, and some time after he asked the nurse—

‘ Where is she ? ’

‘ Who, sir ? ’

‘ My wife. She was here ; I want her.’

He seemed to take Honor's appearance as in the natural course of events ; and when she returned to his bedside, she heard the feeble words, ' It was good of you to come—how did you hear ? '

' You must not talk,' she said, pity and self-reproach rising within her.

' I fell,' he vaguely murmured. ' How long ago ? Don't leave me again.'

He seemed asleep and silent for a while, then the words came faintly through the twilight : ' Kiss me, Norah.'

For a moment she paused, then stooped and laid her cool lips, dewy fresh, to his forehead, a seal of her self-renunciation—for life. He was still afterwards, and when the heavy regular breathing told that sleep had come to him, the cold winter moon saw a figure kneeling by the bed, not pray-

ing, yet feeling calmly and thankfully that now the bitterness of death was past.

‘ Winter crept aged from the hills,’ and Spring came ; pale primroses shone like stars among the ivy carpets of the woods and the grass tangle of the hedge-banks ; the larch tassels flushed pink with Spring, and the larks soared and fluttered and sang ever higher in the blue ; while Rex drew back to life, and to the terrible knowledge of his shattered limbs, his maimed existence.

It was not till late in the Spring he learnt the whole truth ; but for some time a suspicion of the real state of his case had been growing on him ; although Honor, being warned by the doctor, had been very careful not to give him any reason to think his recovery would not be complete in time.

But Rex's instinct divined what all dreaded to tell him, and he determined quietly to ascertain the truth.

Honor was sitting one April morning in her husband's room, writing two or three letters at his dictation. It was an exquisite spring day, and the open window looked out on an orchard which was one mass of blossom, even to the turf below, which was white with fallen petals; and a 'wise thrush' was singing close to the window. Honor finished her letter and stopped to listen to the bird's song. This calm pastoral country of green fields and hawthorn hedges, with the great elm trees throwing long shadows on the meadow grass, seemed confined and tame after the free land of cliff and scar and heather, the thunder of the great Atlantic waves, and the sea-birds' cries ;

and yet the peaceful, tender beauty of Shakespeare's country soothed her more than she herself knew.

‘When did Burnet say I might be moved?’ Rex asked from his bed.

She rose and came to his side. ‘In two or three weeks,’ she answered. ‘Have you been thinking where we shall go?’

He smiled and stretched out a hand far thinner and whiter than Honor's own. ‘It is pleasant to hear the word “we,”’ he said; ‘I didn't know how lonely I used to feel. Make up your mind for us as to the move.’

‘I know so few places,’ she said, ‘and I don't think you strong enough yet for a long journey.’

‘Not quite,’ he answered half sarcastically. She looked at him nervously, as if afraid of his having realised his helplessness.

ness. Rex understood, but said nothing ; and, at that moment, there was a sound of well-known wheels stopping below in front of the inn. ‘There are the Hunsdons,’ said Rex. ‘Go down to them. Norah, and make Hunsdon come up here if he is with them ; will you ?’

Honor obeyed ; and in a few minutes reappeared laden with a huge basket of primroses, and followed by young Hunsdon.

‘Mrs. Hunsdon has brought you these, Rex,’ she said, setting down her burden of pale blossoms gently, as if she loved them. as in truth she did.

‘And the mother wants Mrs. Archdale just to go for a drive with her,’ put in Hunsdon. ‘It’s such a lovely morning, and I’ll stay and take care of you, old fellow, in case you want anything.’

‘I would rather not,’ began Honor, but was promptly stopped by Rex.

‘It is just what she needs,’ he said determinedly. ‘Be off and put on your things, Norah; unless you want to see me in a rage.—Ah, Hunsdon, I see the end of the “Pink ‘Un” sticking out of your pocket! Give it me, that’s a good boy.’

Thus urged Honor departed, and the sound of the retreating wheels of Mrs. Hunsdon’s carriage was soon audible in the quiet room above. ‘You can smoke, you know, Hunsdon, if you like. Burnet said this morning I might have a cigarette myself.’

‘Have it now, then,’ said Hunsdon, producing his case and lights.

For a little while after there was

silence. Rex was absorbed in his paper and the enjoyment of the luxury of smoking, from which he had been so long debarred. Hunsdon was standing by the window, looking out, with hands in coat pockets and cigarette in mouth. Presently the rustling as of the laying down of the paper caused him to turn. ‘Anything I can do for you, old fellow?’

‘Yes; come here.’ Archdale fixed his eyes firmly on his friend. ‘I tell you what I want—the truth about myself.’

Hunsdon looked startled.

‘Now look here, my boy, don’t be frightened of telling me; for poor Norah’s eyes have made me guess it the last three weeks. Burnet always dodges me when I want to ask him, and I rely on you. But——’ the lad began to wish he had not

volunteered to keep Archdale company that morning.

‘They will all blow me up if I let out the truth,’ he reflected. ‘I’d lie like fun, only I don’t believe it would be any good ; he’d spot it at once.’

‘It won’t hurt me,’ said Rex ; ‘but look here, I shall never be able to ride again, I suppose?’

The lad was silent, his chest heaved, then a big sob burst from him. ‘Don’t, don’t ask me,’ he gasped. ‘How can I tell?’

Archdale’s face grew still paler. ‘Is it worse than that?’ he said. ‘Great God ! you don’t mean I shall never walk?—be a log on men’s hands for ever?’

He had dragged himself up in the bed by sheer force of nerve, and was staring

hopelessly, appealingly at Hunsdon as for mercy. The young fellow strove to answer, but could not.

‘I see!’ muttered Rex, sinking back; ‘for Heaven’s sake don’t speak to me! Leave me; it’s all you can do for me now.’

And when Honor returned she was met by Hunsdon with pale lips and scared eyes.

‘Go to him, Mrs. Archdale,’ he said hurriedly. ‘He was questioning me, and I let out—I was wrong, but he made me—that he would never be able to walk again.’

‘You told him!’ She sped upstairs, a quick sick alarm within her of the evil effects the sudden breaking of such news might have had on Rex, still so weak. One

look at him showed he knew the utter hopelessness of his case ; and yet he was quiet ; there was even a faint attempt to speak lightly in his voice.

‘ It’s a bad job, Norah, isn’t it ? ’

She had dreaded the burst of misery which she had thought must come ; but this was worse ! Her lips moved dumbly in assent. His courage struck her with a sharp remorse, as his thin hand stretched out weakly to receive hers ; strong, supple, beautiful, resting near him on the bed.

‘ You must help me to make the best of it, that is all. Will you be as good to me as you have been all this while ? ’

Her hand closed on his, her head drooped, she could not speak.

‘ So we will kiss and be friends,’ said poor Rex, a wan smile on his lips, ‘ and

never speak of the past ; but it will be a wretched life for you, poor child !’

‘ Not if you can be happy.’ The words came impulsively and sadly ; then, ‘ Forgive me,’ she said very quietly ; and with a new quick emotion Rex answered—

‘ God bless you, wife !’

And in that blessing her soul found rest.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Je n'aime que ce qu'ont aimé les meilleurs des hommes ; je ne cherche rien aux dépens d'aucun d'eux ; je cherche ce que chacun peut avoir, ce qui est nécessaire au besoin de tous, ce qui finirait leurs misères, ce qui rapproche, unit, console ; je ne veux que la vie des peuples bons—ma paix dans la paix de tous.—SENANCOUR.

‘HONOR ! Norah ! I say—here !’

Honor, seven years older, standing on the terrace of the villa near San Miniato she and her husband had taken for the winter, turned round. Her hands were full of early flowers which she had been gathering this fresh, sweet February morning ; waxen narcissuses ; anemones, faintly flushed with dawn-tints, or deep-hued with intense passionate purple, paling and faint-

ing from the dusky velvet heart outward into tenderest amethyst; violets, sweet with the dews of the young year. She was leaning on the stonework of the terrace, soft with brown moss, looking down on the darkness of the cypresses and the olive orchards and vineyards below, severed by high stone walls trailed over by sere capsicum vines; beyond lay the town like a fairy city, all red, gold, brown, and ivory-white, filling the vale beneath and spreading out on the mountain side, with the Arno in the midst, winding like a thin, shining snake under its many bridges; while dominating all, rose the Duomo and Giotto's tower, ærial, slender, lovely; 'a vision, a delight, and a desire;' Florence's lily turned to stone, rising in the clear, tinted, delicate

air, and thrown out by the mountains beyond, whose heights of soft purple-brown and green were dappled above with snow.

So Honor had been dreaming in the tender sunlight of the winter morning, when her brother Leo's voice broke in on the stillness.

She could scarcely have told from what fancies the boy's clear call had startled her, or what vague memories of the town which lay below her feet, had stirred her heart—not 'with the sound of a trumpet,' but rather with the mingled echoes of many notes, from many instruments and voices—a great human symphony, faintly heard from afar, of hate and love, grief and joy, passion and despair and pain—and with religion and art, two great calm melodies,

blending all into one harmony. She heard the echo, of 'old unhappy far-off' things and battles long ago,' mingled with other sounds; the low moan, which must have told Savonarola's baptism of fire was accomplished; the light, sweet laugh of the ladies who stole away from plague and horror and death, to fair gardens and streamlets, and the story-telling which should win all ages and all lands to share in their pleasure; and above all, the woman's heart listened to one voice, never heard in Florence, save as the low, dove-sweet tones of a girl; but sounding—through Heaven's glory, as through Purgatory's pain—warning, reproach, divine tenderness, to her lover and to us for evermore: '*Io son, ben son Beatrice.*'

And so it was with a start, Honor

answered Lionel's call. 'What is it, Leo? Here I am.'

A heedless crash through the thick plantation bordering the turf; a rather sharp exclamation, regarding an aloe Master Lionel had caught at, in the effort to save himself from being tripped up by the leafless branches of a vine which strayed across the narrow path he had taken—and the young gentleman appeared, somewhat heated and breathless, by his sister's side.

He ought by rights to have been at Harrow, but scarlet fever had broken out in his house there, at the beginning of the January term, and Lionel being sent home, and being very much in everybody's way there, Lady Field had only too thankfully accepted Honor's suggestion that he should

come out to Florence, on a visit to her and Rex, till he could return to school. He was used to spending a large part of his usual holidays with the Archdales, to the great relief of Agnes and her husband, who both found a boy of fourteen a great nuisance about the house ; their own two children being both girls, now aged eight and nine and blessed with a sweet placidity of disposition and an entire want of animal spirits, which rendered them ideal children to a mother whose chief desire in life was the calm comfort resulting from undisturbed self-gratification and an approving conscience.

The Archdales generally spent the winter in Italy or the south of France, one of the results of Rex's accident being the bending of one of his ribs on the left

lung, necessitating a clear air through the cold months; at the same time, this year, the doctor said he needed bracing; and, after some deliberation, at the end of October, Honor and her husband had established themselves in the villa, in the garden of which she was musing when Leo interrupted her, with two or three letters in his hand.

She had never forgotten or broken the promise she had made; and Rex, though sometimes impatient or exacting when pain troubled him, or the memory of his lost health and strength racked him—as it would even now, with a worse anguish than any bodily ache—yet held his wife always, with a love mingled with gratitude for the unselfish, gentle tendance which had never fainted nor

wearied, in caring for him, these seven years.

‘Here, Rex asked me to bring out these letters to you ; they have just come, and he says, if you don’t mind, we’ll drive into Florence this morning, to get some more cartridge-paper and cardboard at Good-ban’s. We’ve used all we had, and we can’t get on.’

‘You are sure you didn’t propose the idea, Leo ? I thought Rex would scarcely be up to a drive this morning. Can’t you really get on ?’

‘It’s a beastly bother !’ responded her brother, balancing himself on the balustrade and tilting himself as far back as he could possibly go, in order to poke lazily on the other side, with a bit of stick, at a torpid green lizard, who, deceived by the

sunshine, into the idea that it was summer, had crept from his home in a crevice of the wall, and who was rueing his mistake. 'I don't know what we are to do; Rex hasn't any, and it will be no end of a sell if the whole thing is corpsed, just for a sheet of cartridge-paper.'

'You know I hate that word, Leo.

'Well, it will be corpsed, won't it?' said the young gentleman, viciously knocking the unoffending lizard with a jerk on to the grass below, as though to emphasise his words. 'What do you call it? And now that we've asked all that small fry of Elliotts and Boyles to come up and see the play, I shall feel an awful fool if it's not ready, that's all.'

'I don't mind,' said Honor; 'if Rex feels equal to the drive, it is all right. I

was just going in to him, but we will go and order the carriage first.

This business accomplished, they turned in through the piazza, where, by a table, sat a figure in a wheel-chair, as intent as Leo himself on the present great object of their two lives—the production of ‘The Miller and his Men’ grand romantic drama, as adapted to Webb’s scenes and characters, in a small toy theatre, ostensibly for the delight of some English children living in Florence, but really for their own amusement, albeit Lionel loftily disclaimed any aim in it except to ‘please the kids.’ His brother-in-law was less magnificent; the enforced monotony of his life enabled him to feel a real interest and excitement in the careful preparation and production of the mimic dramas, and his

fingers had grown wonderfully dexterous in the management and manipulation of all manner of such contrivances as miniature traps, tricks, &c. ‘The Corsican Brothers’ had been already produced with immense success, a blaze of blue fire, and the ghost melody played on the violin behind the scenes, by a young Italian whom the Archdales knew; and ‘The Miller and his Men’ was now in active preparation, as was shown by the large table by which Rex sat, which was strewn with scenes of the most flaring colouring and bold perspective, penknives, scissors, a cigar-box cut into slips of brown wood, a bottle of liquid glue, and miniature paper figures, of sentimental or ferocious aspect. Rex looked up eagerly as his wife and Leo entered.

‘Oh, here you are!’ he said; ‘I just wanted to show you I’ve managed it at last: this trick works all right now. I’ll show you on the table. Where’s Grindoff with the pistols? That’s he, the beggar in the long slide over there; just hand him here, will you, Leo? and the book. Where’s the scene? Oh, here. “Draw off Grindoff fighting, and put on Grindoff rushing over practical drawbridge—plate 4—pull up drawbridge after him”—there! it’s done.’

‘A 1!’ exclaimed Leo, who had watched the rehearsal of the drama’s most thrilling effect with breathless interest, and then tested it by working the trick himself.

‘There is the carriage,’ said Honor.

‘Hallo!’ remarked Leo, ‘I must wash my hands; they are all over glue.’

He dashed off, and, as he left the room,

a sharp sound escaped Rex. ‘What is it, dear?’ Honor asked gently.

‘It’s only I’m a fool. I suppose Leo’s talk put it in my head. I dreamed all night I was playing football. I don’t suppose I should if I could at my age. But in the dream! You don’t know what it seemed like, Norah, or what I’d give to have it true only for once.’

It is seldom a woman sympathises with a passion for football—the keen joy of a rough physical struggle, grip and tug, sway and rush; but in Honor’s nature there was some strain undeveloped, yet akin to such delights, which made her understand the terrible tense longing in Rex’s tone, and her sympathy was so quick she could not answer him, except by that pity of her eyes which was the reply he

liked best. 'Here's Leo,' he said, after a moment's pause, 'coming downstairs like a young earthquake. Call Capper to get me into the carriage, will you? Never mind, Norah, I'm right enough.'

They drove down the slope of the hill, where the light breeze ruffled the olive trees from dark to grey, and here and there an anemone shone, like a drop of blood, crimson or purple against the moss-grown, time-stained stones of the walls, to where the city lay 'washed in the morning water gold.'

That strange life of an historic city, the past murmur of whose swift tide had filled Honor's thought this morning, the life 'which living not can ne'er be dead,' had little significance or interest to either of her companions ; but to her herself the

widening sympathies which each year brought gave an ever fresher and sadder charm to each relic which bound past and present together, and made life in Florence wear for her the charm of a legend. Even now, as they drove through the Porta Romana, a dream of dead days filled her eyes, and her husband laughed.

‘What are you “in a referee” over?’ he asked. ‘I know when you look like that you would like to be mooning about in a picture gallery, or some church, before a battered-nosed monument, or cracked picture. Isn’t it so?’

‘I can’t make out what people find to care for in such things,’ observed Leo sapiently.

‘Neither can I, but Norah can. Never mind, Leo; while she’s catching her death

in the way she likes, you and I will enjoy ourselves at Doney's.'

'It's too cold for ices,' said Honor.

'Then we'll order chocolate; but if it's too cold for ices it's too cold for churches. They are enough to freeze one's blood. Never mind, what's your "particular wanity" in that line this morning? Leo and I can get the cartridge-paper without your help; so we'll drop you first where you will, and then go to Goodban's and the confectioner's.'

'But suppose I want some macaroons too?' remonstrated Honor.

'We'll get you a bagful, and you can eat them on the way back and spoil your teeth. Now, where do you want to go?'

'St. Lorenzo, then,' said Honor. She had a longing for the new sacristy—the

soft gloom of which she loved perhaps better than aught else in Florence—and was glad to gratify it.

‘Poor girl!’ said Rex, when they had left her at the church. ‘One reason I’m glad to have you, Leo, is that it gives her a little liberty. She hardly leaves me when we are alone, and never wants to do anything for her own pleasure.’

‘She’s a brick!’ said Leo. ‘But then, Rex, she’s so fond of you.’

‘I don’t know why,’ his companion simply answered; whereunto the boy responded as simply—

‘Because you are her husband, of course.’

A shadow passed over the man’s brow which Leo did not understand.

‘Cause and effect don’t always hang

together in such cases,' he said, a little bitterly ; then with a change of tone, ' I wish, though, I could get her to think rather more about herself. When poor Mrs. Ross was with us she and I managed it between us sometimes. She would persuade Honor that I should like to hear about any party or some play I wanted her to see, and she would stay with me ; so we used to take Mrs. Norah in now and then. But now that the dear old lady's dead—and Honor felt her loss awfully—I can't manage her as well. Why, even Mrs. Ross's living with us was my doing ; Norah never suggested it. I guessed she would like it, and that Mrs. Ross would be a help to her, so wrote secretly to ask her to come.'

‘ I say, Rex ! ’

‘Well?’

‘How did *you* learn to think of other people?’

‘It’s a precious hard lesson, old chap; I hope you’ll never have to learn it, as I had, by remembering what a bother you must be anyhow.’

‘Oh, Rex, not to Honor!’

‘God bless her, no. She has never let me feel it. And yet sometimes—’ his voice sank—‘I think it would have been better if I had died, and she had not been tied to a log!’

‘I wish you wouldn’t talk like that!’ exclaimed the boy impetuously: ‘you know, as well as I do, that it isn’t true, and that you don’t believe it, and Norah would hate your saying it.’

Rex’s face lighted up at the quick,

unmasked assurance of the lad's affection. 'Thank you, Leo,' he said, thinking how like he looked to his sister when thus excited, and how unlike his mother.

Meanwhile Honor had entered the great church and slowly turned into the chapel. She felt a longing for the sadness and mystery and beauty of those great monuments ; Angelo's mighty effort to explain, if not to answer, the question of the Sphinx of life : to solve the riddle of the painful earth which leaves the mystery deeper than before. Was this the end ? a dawn as sad as death ; a day waking in Titanic throes, terrible as those of birth, to labour which shall not satisfy, which shall leave the world as strangely perplexed and dim as ever ; and above all, those calm, sad faces, noble and dreaming and pure, the

idealised images of those two of a bad race, whom death removed in youth, with blameless scutcheons ; ere their families' bitter story of force and fraud and guile had been written, perchance, on their shields likewise.

Was this the truth of life? and if so, what of the aspect of Botticelli's Venus in the Uffizi? what of the majestic calm, Greek art taught us, 'when it ran and reached the goal'? of the lovely serene mildness of the Madonnas, whereof this city of lilies seemed the natural home? of those happy, sweet singing boys of Robbia and Donatello, and of a thousand other lovely things which breathed divine, intangible life in this soft southern air—were all these true too?

It troubled and perplexed her ; her eyes fell again on the figure of Night, but even sleep was sad. The words, so often quoted, and so often felt before that mighty form, came to her thoughts, almost to her lips :

Grato m' è 'l sonno e più l' esser di sasso ;
Mentre che il danno e la vergogna dura,
Non veder, non sentir m' è gran ventura ;
Però non mi destar ; deh, parla basso

There was another solitary pilgrim to this shrine of Michael Angelo's vast mournful aspiration and fathomless melancholy, whose steps, falling on the marble of the pavement, startling the echoes close to her, made her involuntarily turn round.

For a moment she paused bewildered, wondering if this were truth ; and so it was,

with the shadow of that passionate, unanswered questioning of life still lingering in her gaze, that she and Stephen Nugent met again.

CHAPTER XL.

—It loses what it lived for,
And eternally must lose it.
Better ends may be in prospect,
Deeper blisses (if you choose it),
But this life's end and this love bliss
Have been lost here. Doubt you whether
This she felt as, looking at me,
Mine and her souls rushed together?—CRISTINA.

THEY both stood silent, who could say with what memories thronging and surging up in them, even as his footsteps had startled the echoes around? and then their hands met and clasped.

Each saw change in the other, but he noted the most in her; for although his hair was touched with grey, his skin browner, his forehead lined, Honor saw still the

old face, only finer, stronger, gentler than of yore, and with an energy and resolve that had not once been there.

To him, the woman standing there was fairer than the girl to whose garment his lips had so madly clung in parting; the promise of her beauty was fulfilled, but its very completeness was sad. It held no promise and no hope. This was not the eager, wayward, passionate girl he had left, but a woman who had learnt in patience to possess her soul.

‘ You ! ’ he said at last.

‘ Yes, we are spending the winter here.’

Nugent could have laughed aloud; the ‘ we ’ forced the sense of the present upon him. This was how they met—they two who had parted seven years since, soul speaking to soul. He had even less right

now to remember than she had; and yet—was she so changed, indeed? and why did his heart ache madly for one word of that past—of his dead youth—even while he felt it were best, far best, not recalled?

Was it seven years ago? As he gazed at her, the old Honor shone out from her face and Florence faded away. They two were alone once more on the livid, brown moor by the wintry sea, with the low snowy sky above them, brooding in sullen quietude. It was her voice, low and vibrating as of old, that dispelled the vision:

‘Are you staying here in Florence?’

‘My brother is dead,’ he said mechanically—‘you know that—I am on my way to England. I landed at Naples, and could not help a day or two in Florence. I leave to-night.’

He spoke rapidly, uneasily ; but the mere statement of facts seemed to bring back his present self.

‘ Yes,’ she answered vaguely—her gaze had returned to the ‘ Night ’—steeped in her long oblivion of the world that maddens round her.

‘ And Rex—is he here ? ’

‘ Yes, he must be waiting for me now—will you come ? ’

‘ I ! ’—he hesitated.

‘ He knows you know me,’ she answered quietly ; ‘ I told him long ago you were down at Lynion that summer, painting ; of course he knew you did not know my name.’

It was like herself, the frank facing of the unspoken doubt ; yet Nugent understood that the memory of what those

summer days had meant to him and her, was a secret known to their two souls alone, sacred and sealed for evermore.

Silently they walked together, from the chapel out to where, in the sunlight, which looked warmer than it was, was the carriage, as Honor had foretold.

‘Why, Nugent, how did you come?—Where ever did you pick him up, Norah?’ exclaimed Rex, leaning over the carriage, in his excitement to welcome his friend. ‘My dear, dear old boy—how glad I am!’

Nugent felt a certain load drop from him, now that at last the moment he had often thought of, when he should meet Rex as Honor’s husband, had come. True, his own life had so changed in the last seven years, was now so far removed from his old self, that there was no reason they should

not meet as friends; and in the confusion of greeting and Rex's delight, he found it impossible to resist Archdale's imperative command to him to get into the carriage with them and drive back home. 'Leaving to-night, are you? All the more reason you should come with us now—we'll send you back when you will.'

As once before, Stephen glanced at Honor for her sanction to the invitation; she did not speak—he wondered if she too remembered that morning at Trebarva, when he besought leave to return—but he saw that no wish of hers withheld him.

So they all drove back together. A keen throb of pity stirred Nugent's heart, when they had driven up the aloe-bordered path of the garden, with its shrubberies of myrtle, oleander, and pomegranate, now blos-

somless and sad, and stopped before the small *perron* of the villa; and he realised, as Rex was helped out, his utter disablement. Something like reverence touched him, in his wonderment at the cheerfulness of the man to whom the enjoyment of his bodily strength and health had been almost the sum of life.

Honor went upstairs to take off her bonnet and cloak, and the others turned into the *sala*. Nugent glanced round to see if there were any tokens of Honor's course of life, and his quick eye caught signs of interests that had been dormant in the girl he had known. A piece of embroidery, reminiscent of old Italian brocade, was half hanging from a large work receptacle, half basket, half bag, of plush; and the piano was strewn with some music, an odd

mixture : a fugue of Bach's, Scharwenka's dances, their 'sad perplexed minors' according oddly with the scores of 'Olivette,' 'Iolanthe,' and 'Falka,' which testified to Honor's ministering to the musical tastes of her husband and brother. Stephen did not see this, but he was amused to find that a little vellum-bound 'Vita Nuova'—that book which some one said was written for lovers and the young, but whose charm to many of us is that when reading therein youth and love seem ours once more—with a sprig of myrtle marking the reader's place, lay side by side with the last shilling tale of horrors.

'Jolly book that,' Leo remarked approvingly as Nugent took up the last-mentioned volume ; 'Norah reads it to us of an evening, when we are cutting out.' The

young gentleman had returned to his avocations, and was vigorously pasting sheets of figures to the cardboard he had obtained.

‘We’ve gone in for theatrical management,’ Rex explained to Stephen; ‘and as the production of a grand revival of “The Miller and his Men” is arranged for to-morrow night, and Leo is stage manager, he has no time to lose. Hallo, though, young ’un, don’t you be trying to cut out those bands of robbers drinking. I know your way with them; you’ll be snipping through all their legs—you’d much better leave them to Norah. She’s the only one who can manage them. She’s musical director,’ Rex continued to his friend, ‘and I’m the boss of the show. Now, Stephen, draw up your chair to the fire—thank

goodness it's an open one ! here's a cigar—and tell me all about yourself.'

'There's not much to tell,' said Nugent ; 'I suppose I have done with India for good. Poor George's death leaves me the only person who can take the chief direction of the bank ; so I had to return. When his boy is of age, we shall be nominally on equal terms ; but George, I fancy, had even less faith in the lad's business head and inclination than he used to have in mine.'

'And I suppose you will put up for Parliament and be no end of a swell?' said Rex, some sadness in his tone.

'I doubt the swelldom, but perhaps I shall try to get into the House. There are some things I have learnt to know about, in India, which need setting right. I may

as well try to do it, for want of a better man.'

There was a new purpose, energy, ambition in his voice. "We know what we are, but we know not what we may be," he added, with a laugh which yet held a regret for the delicious, purposeless, purposing leisure of youth and its possibilities now for ever gone. But Rex looked at him with envy.

'True enough,' he answered, 'whoever said it. If I had been a clever fellow like you, or even fond of books and things like that, I sometimes fancy this mightn't have come so hard on me ; but, as it is, I have to get interested in whatever I can, and go back and play with toys, even.' He took up a little paper figure from the table near him, and threw it down with a bitter laugh.

‘I oughtn’t to complain, though,’ he said, ‘I suppose, when I think of Honor. Stephen!’—his voice sank, and he glanced round to see that Lionel was out of earshot—‘do you remember the last talk we had, the week before my spill?’

Yes—Stephen remembered.

‘I didn’t know then, what the girl I was talking about, was. She came to me, nursed me, saved me. I should never have pulled through, but for her. I can never be what I should to her; the protecting and cherishing I promised, she gives to me, but she has been the best wife ever man knew, and——’

Rex broke off. A hand was on the lock, and Honor entered the room.

The short afternoon glowed and waned. Rex, absorbed and happy in his friend’s

society, took little apparent heed of his wife; and when, after a dinner, earlier than usual, on Nugent's account, she left them to their coffee and cigarettes, he nodded and only said, 'Don't forget Nugent is off in half an hour; come in to speed him away.'

She assented, and opening the French windows, stepped out into the garden. The air was calm: sunset had not yet come, but a mist was rising in the valley beyond the town, veiling the far-off mountains, as the present veils the past till one feels as if it had never been real—the joy and pain thereof never one's own. Even so, gazing at those distant dream-like hills, it seemed hard to believe mortal feet had ever trodden the paths of their chill, ghostly heights.

She strolled slowly through the

gardens, so void of summer's delight, or even of spring's promise. The faint smell from the violet-bed was the only reminder of the time that had passed, that would come to the world again, when

Time would bring on summer,
When briars shall have leaves as well as thorns,
And be as sweet as sharp.

Again she stopped to gather their dim blossoms, resting them against the strength of a myrtle spray, the darkness of a brown-veined ivy-leaf, and fastened them in the belt of her dress; as she lifted her eyes she saw Nugent coming to her from the house. She stood silent, still, till he reached her.

‘Are you going?’ she said.

‘Yes.’ He halted; then continued, ‘I wanted to—to tell you how sorry I was for you, when I heard of Mrs. Ross’s death.’

Even now she could scarcely bear the sudden mention of her friend's dear name ; but from him it was less pain. 'I knew you would be,' she said ; and her former self was in the answer.

'And her book, I saw it appeared ! Was it successful ?'

'I think so, in a way. People did not agree about it ; but I suppose they meant praise, when they said it was not like a woman's work. It was odd though, for it was only being a woman made her write it.'

They had drifted back into the remembrance of their past. Impetuously he exclaimed—

'And you !'

She turned and looked in his face. 'I have wanted to thank you,' she said, 'all these years.'

To her, her words were simple truth ; to the man, they sounded subtlest, albeit unintentional, irony, and an echo of irony was in his voice as he answered, ‘ I am glad you are happy ! ’

If she felt the bitter tone, she showed no consciousness thereof, only returned—

‘ You made me do right, and I found it was right. It was all through you.’

Through him ! Then a memory, a hope, a love, to which, for a moment, he had felt hardly true, revived within to his shame. He wanted to tell her ; but how ?

‘ I often wondered——’ he said ; then a sudden passionate earnestness overcame him : ‘ Oh, Honor, believe I tried to know what was best for you ; and you alone ! ’

She did not appear to note the bursting

forth from his lips of her name, that name which those lips had once made dear and lovely to her. But her smile answered him, and in it he read her nature more clearly than he had ever done before : read in its sweet triumphant assurance of her faith in him, the sign of her loyalty. As she was loyal to her husband, not only in word and act, but in thought and feeling, so was she loyal to the memory of her Love and her trust in his truth.

He, Stephen Nugent, standing there, had no power to make the blood within her veins flow quicker, her eyes shine, her voice grow softer—such possibility of sin as had lain within the old love was conquered and slain ; harmless beneath her feet, as the dragon beneath St. Margaret's—but the memory of the love which

had wrought mightily within her was with her, and would remain with her, hallowed for evermore.

‘I wanted to tell you——’ he paused, hesitated; then said, ‘I am going to be married.’

A minute’s silence; he did not look at her, but like an answer through the evening hush came the soft, distinct notes of the Angelus from the convent, each sound falling on Stephen’s heart as the throb of a woman’s subdued passion; then he heard Honor’s voice, ardent, sweet as of yore.

‘I am glad.’

The hand was stretched out to meet his as in the pledge of friendship he had asked so long ago.

‘Will you tell me about her?’ she asked gently.

‘Her name is Margaret Vigors,’ he answered. ‘She is very good and lovely. When I first knew her I thought she was—like you.’

A strange tender pleasure shone for one moment from the eyes of the woman he had loved ; but he did not see it, and went on :

‘She is coming home with her father in a month or two, when he gets his leave ; then we shall be married.’

He had told her all ; once more their gaze met truly, loyally, and her words as she repeated them, ‘I am glad,’ were at once a benediction and a prayer.

Would Stephen rather she had been less calm ? a feeling akin to self-reproach and remorse swept over him. He was much older than she ; yet before him were

love, ambition, success, life still worth having, its prizes yet within his grasp; while she!—had this, indeed, been the right path for the girl he had loved, to whom he had shown it and said, ‘Walk therein, although it severs us for evermore’?

The sense of the injustice, the contrast between their lots, smote him so sharply that it made him speak bitterly, from feeling the insufficiency of Honor’s life to fill her heart and soul. A man never doubts his own power to satisfy every need of the woman he loves; but without him, she must fain find the whole world too narrow.

‘After all,’ he said, ‘we learn one thing from life: hearts are not so easily

broken, or lives laid waste, as we once used to think.'

'I don't know!' She paused and looked far away at the Arno, golden in the suffused evening light, with the black bridges spanning it; the great dome, ruddy and splendid, with the campanile by its side, rising slender and grey against the mist and forecast purple shadows of the mountains beyond.

'I never understood,' she said, 'Our Lord's words, "He that loseth his life shall find it." It must mean in another world. Here—if we cannot take our own life, so turn away from it—we find other people's lives; our own again—never!'

'Forgive me!' There were some moments before his words came.

‘It was you saved us both,’ she said.
‘I wanted you to know that I know it
——now.’

Neither spoke more; in silence, together they turned and walked to the house.

.

‘Good-bye!’

It was Nugent spoke, as he extended his hand to Honor, where she stood by her husband’s chair, in the piazza. He knew her words were true; she had found others’ lives and lived content in them, having renounced her own; and thus he bade her farewell.

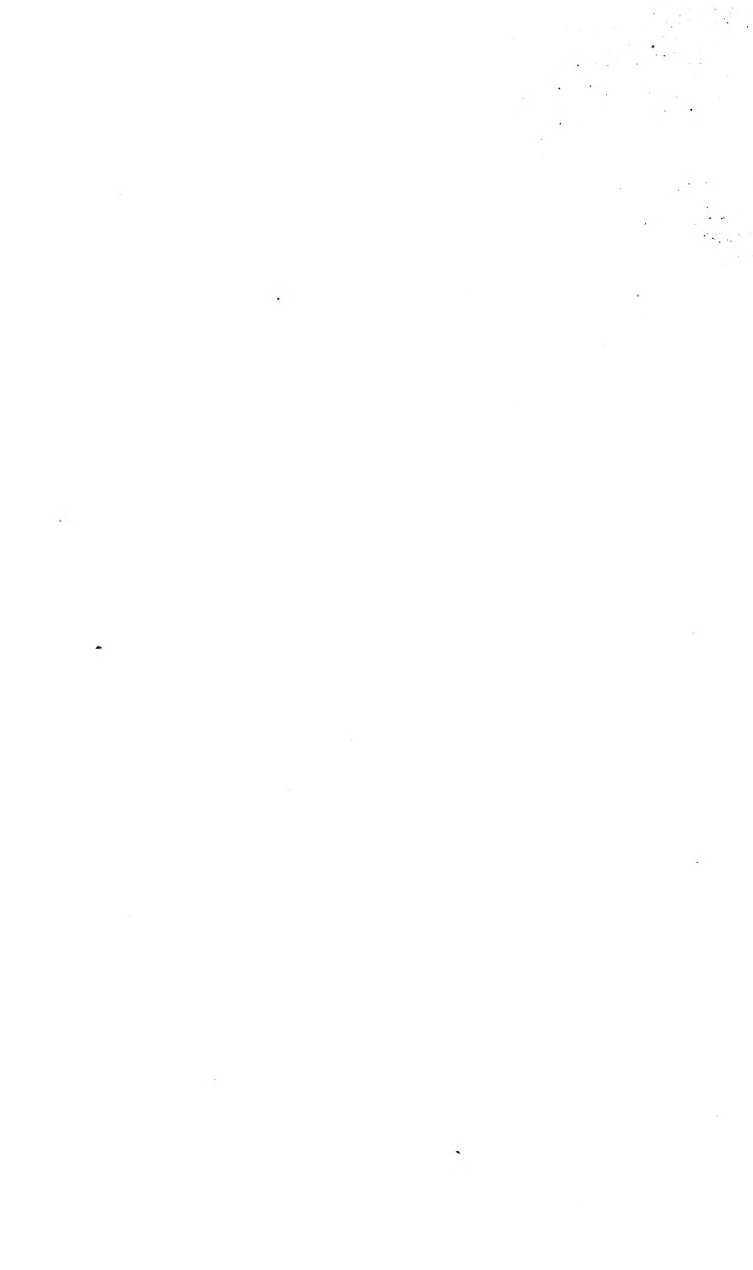
As he turned, he saw her once more where she stood; the mingled lights of sunset and moonrise falling faintly on her, chequering her white gown and the

marble at her feet with fantastic shadows, but full and tender on her steadfast eyes, and resting like an aureole round her brows. So he saw her face last—as it were the face of an angel.

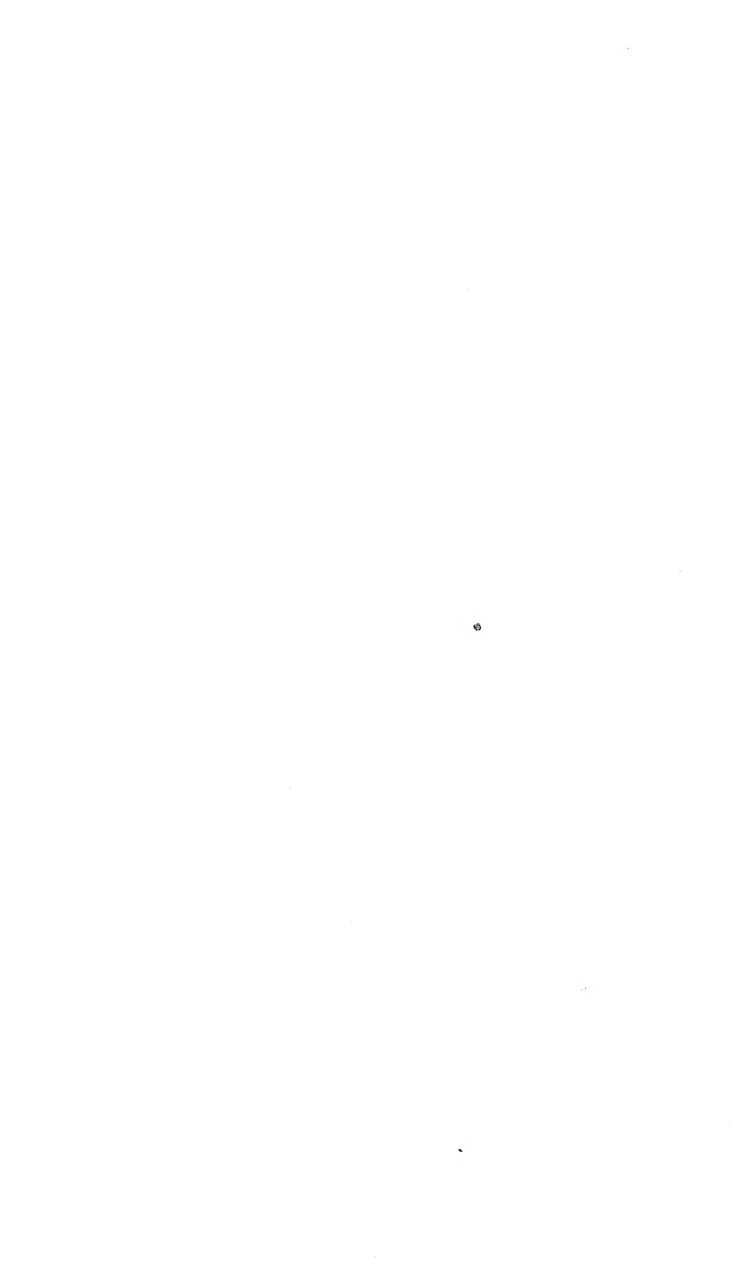
THE END.

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